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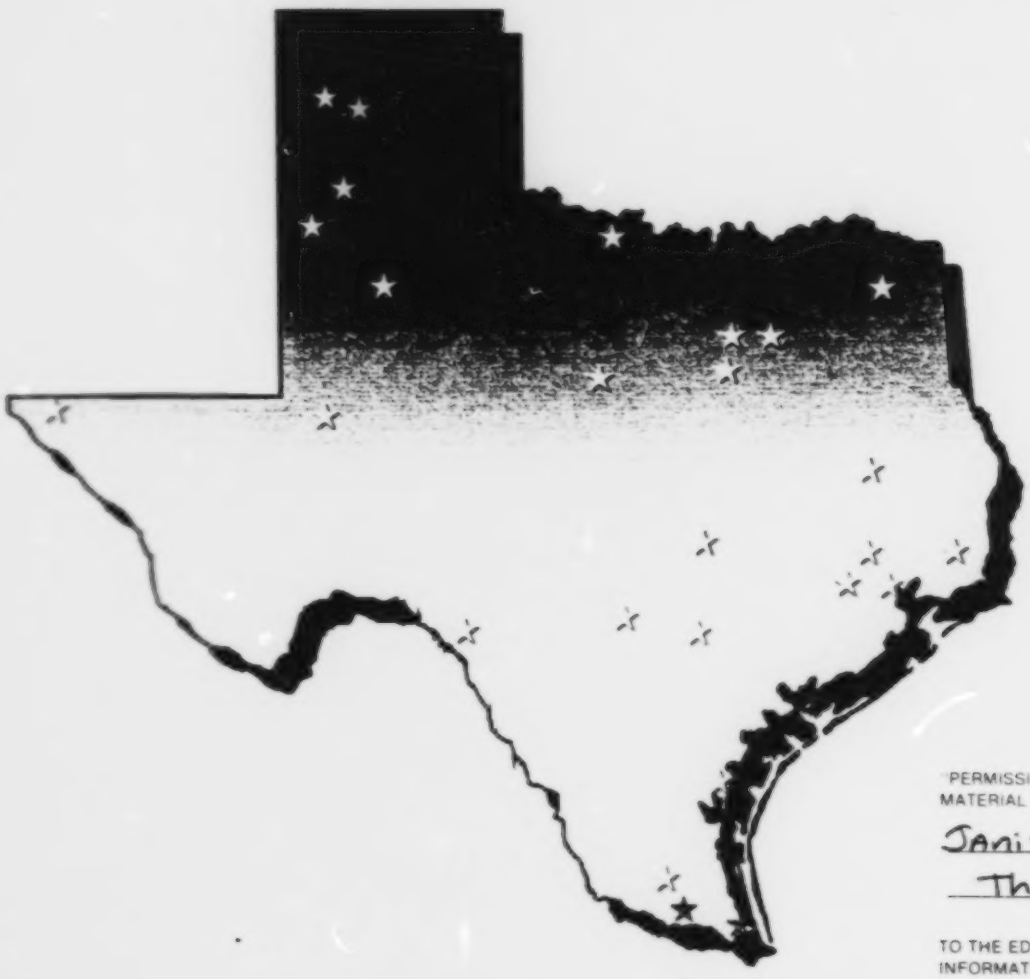
ABSTRACT

In 1994-95, a study identified over 50 Texas schools that were heavily impacted by poverty but had high scores on state achievement tests. Specifically, the schools received Title I funds and were implementing Title I schoolwide programs, and at each school, over 60 percent of students met free or reduced-price lunch criteria; at least 70 percent passed the reading section of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS); and at least 70 percent passed the TAAS math section. Case studies of 26 of these schools found much diversity in instructional programs and approaches. However, seven common areas or themes emerged: (1) focus on the academic success of every student; (2) no excuses; (3) careful experimentation; (4) inclusion of everyone in problem solving; (5) sense of family; (6) collaboration and trust; and (7) passion for learning and growing. Profiles of the 26 schools include a brief description, demographics, awards, TAAS results, and principal and teacher comments. Excerpts of case-study interviews include success stories related by parents, teachers, and staff. A self-study and planning guide draws on the seven common themes of successful schools to provide a structured process through which school communities can begin the evaluation and planning necessary for school improvement. Seven modules corresponding to the themes contain worksheets with questions to promote critical reflection and self-evaluation, goal setting, and planning. Suggested readings and a feedback form are included. Suggestions for technical assistance providers include topics and rationale for professional development. (SV)

SUCCESSFUL TEXAS SCHOOLWIDE PROGRAMS:

- **RESEARCH STUDY RESULTS**
- **SCHOOL PROFILES**
- **VOICES OF PRACTITIONERS AND PARENTS**

ED 406 084



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BACKGROUND

Contrary to what is heard and read in mass media and educational literature, there is good reason to be hopeful about the education of students who attend public schools in poor communities. Schools where almost all students live in low-income situations can be schools in which almost all students achieve high levels of academic success. This is known not in theory, but in the practice and the results generated by real schools in Texas.

Through a grant provided by the Texas Education Agency and funding support from the U. S. Department of Education's Region VIII Comprehensive Center: the STAR Center (Support for Texas Academic Renewal, the Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin has studied schools in Texas that met all three of the following important criteria:

1. In the 1994-95 school year, the schools had a high percentage of students who met the federal criteria to receive free or reduced-price lunches. All of the schools had over 60 percent of the students meet free or reduced-price lunch criteria. Most of the schools had over 75 percent of the students meet the same criteria.
2. The schools received Title I funds and were at various stages of implementing Title I schoolwide programs (an approach involving the use of Title I funds to improve the entire school).
3. In the Spring of 1995, in each school, at least 70 percent of the students passed the reading section of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) and at least 70 percent of the students passed the mathematics section of the assessment. In 1995, few Texas schools had reached this level of academic achievement. The 70 percent criterion was selected because it was a key element for identifying schools as "recognized" in the state's accountability system.

In total, the criteria led to the identification of over 50 schools in Texas that were among those most heavily impacted by poverty, yet where achievement on the state's assessment of academic skills was among the highest of all schools in the state. Individually, each of the schools represents an existence proof that high-poverty schools can ensure high levels of academic success for almost all students. Furthermore, in combination, the schools suggest that there are good practices that would enable any high-poverty school to create an environment in which almost all students achieve high levels of academic success. The purpose of our study was to identify those key practices and to bring them to the attention of teachers, principals, parents, and other educational leaders.

Limited resources did not allow us to study all of the schools that met the three criteria. Thus, from the list of over 50 schools, 26 schools were selected to represent the diversity of Texas. As such, schools were selected from 18 of the state's

20 regional education service centers. The 26 schools included urban and rural schools, from large and small districts, and served very diverse ethnic populations.

Our team of researchers and educators spent the spring semester of 1996 visiting these schools and interviewing teachers, principals, parents, aides, support personnel, and central office administrators. We observed classrooms, playgrounds, lunch rooms, and staff meetings. We listened to the stories of their struggles, their successes, and their failures. We read their plans, pored over their data, and tried to understand the roots of their success. After visiting all of the schools once, we returned to conduct more in-depth visits at five of the schools.

Our approach relied heavily on qualitative, case study research methodology. Merriam (1988) explained that case study research designs are appropriate when description and explanation are sought (in contrast to prediction), when there are many variables within a case (as opposed to relatively few variables across many cases), and when a holistic picture of the case is desired (as opposed to a narrow picture with limited dimensions). Thus, case study methodology seemed appropriate for this project.

Merriam also explained that the nature of case study research allows for the evolution of questions throughout the research process. Sometimes, all of the right questions are not known prior to data collection activities. Sometimes, in the process of collecting data, new questions emerge. Thus, our team of researchers met frequently to compare notes and discuss findings. New hypotheses emerged as we visited schools and came to deeper understandings of the common characteristics among the schools. These common characteristics are described in the following section.

FINDINGS

Before describing what we found, it is probably important to describe what was not found. First, if there is a magic formula, a simple prescription, or a miracle program that makes all the difference, we did not find it. We found more differences than similarities in the instructional programs and approaches used in the 26 schools. Some schools used whole language approaches, while others focused more on phonics. Some used constructivist learning approaches, while others engaged in direct teaching. Some were making cutting edge uses of instructional technology, while in others, computer technology was virtually absent in instruction. Some of the schools had joined Henry Levin's Accelerated Schools Project. Some were becoming engaged in the Success for All Program from John Hopkins University. Some were using Reading Recovery approaches. Others seemed to take pride in not having a clear allegiance to any specific program or methodology.

Also, it should be noted that although all of these schools achieved important accomplishments, the schools did not perceive themselves, nor did they wish to be perceived as perfect. They recognized their potential for further growth and they were committed to their ongoing improvement. In each area where we identified common characteristics, a large percentage of the schools exemplified the characteristics, while a few of the 26 schools might not have been strong in that particular area. In other words, each of the schools had areas of strength, and each of the schools had areas where they might improve. Nonetheless, these schools have all achieved important and impressive results.

The common characteristics can be grouped into seven areas or themes. These themes describe the common attitudes, activities, and aspirations of the schools studied. The themes describe the attributes that have influenced the growth and success of the schools. The reader will quickly note that the themes are closely related and to some extent interdependent. Thus, in some ways the division of the themes seems artificial. However, the themes provide an easier way to discuss the complexities of the schools studied.

Theme 1: Focus on the Academic Success of Every Student

Many studies of effective schools emphasized the extent to which successful schools shared a common mission (Texas Education Agency, 1989). Similarly, a study of 12 successful Title I schoolwide projects (U. S. Department of Education, 1994) found that the schools had an agreed-upon vision for all students that was based on higher academic standards. Our study underscores these findings. In all of the 26 schools studied, there was a strong focus on the academic success of every student.

It should be noted that these schools did not simply have a mission. Rather, they had the mission of ensuring the academic success of every student. They did not merely have mission statements. Their sense of mission was articulated in every aspect of their planning, organization, and use of resources.

Almost every decision about the selection of instructional materials or strategies; the adoption of staff development strategies; the use of fiscal resources; the scheduling of the school calendar; the assignment and use of teachers, support personnel, and volunteers; the use of classroom, playground, and building space; or the use of any other resources was guided by a focus on the mission of ensuring the academic success of every student. For example, when the staff at one school decided to supplement the district's whole-language curriculum with phonics-based instruction, it was because they had reason to believe that such a change would allow them to improve the reading achievement of more students. When the staff at another school decided to seek a modification of their school's instructional week, it was done with the goal of creating more time for teachers to come together to plan and learn more about improving instruction.

As mentioned earlier, these schools used a great variety of instructional approaches. However, common among the schools is that they chose their approaches because they believed that the particular approach would be effective in meeting the specific needs of their students and in utilizing the unique strengths of their staff and community. Their beliefs about various approaches were influenced strongly by their formal and informal efforts to collect and analyze information that helped them determine which policies, programs, and practices were most likely to result in improved academic achievement for their students.

"What's best for kids?" was heard repeatedly in the 26 schools as a benchmark for making decisions. To determine what was best, some teachers developed small, informal pilot studies to empirically determine the approaches that were most likely to lead to the academic success of their students. In other cases, educators reviewed the educational literature related to their area of concern and came to conclusions about what might work best with their students. In some cases, principals and teachers visited other schools within or outside of Texas to learn about promising practices. They asked challenging questions to determine the potential of those practices to influence the academic success of their students.

The focus on the academic success of every student was evident in the planning of individual teachers, just as it was evident in whole school planning activities. Teachers planned lessons with a focus on getting each and every student to succeed academically. Teachers were attuned to the special ways in which individual students learned best. They exploited this knowledge to create learning environments that allowed many students to attain challenging academic skills.

In almost all of the 26 schools, teachers were supported in their planning through extensive school and/or district efforts to align curriculum, staff

development, and technology purchases with the objectives of the TAAS. Teachers were more likely to use teacher guides as tools for accomplishing instructional objectives rather than as scripts that they were required to follow. Teachers knew what objective they were teaching and why the particular instructional approach was most likely to work with their students.

Formative assessment results were used widely by teachers to assist them in planning instruction. In some schools, teachers used their own formative assessments, in other schools, teachers used formative assessments created by the school district. In either case, the formative assessments allowed teachers to accurately determine areas of strength and need. When students had mastered the expected skills, teachers frequently went further into other extensions and applications of the academic skills.

Teachers consistently reported that they were actively supported by their principals as they attempted to focus on the academic success of every student. "She'll get us whatever we need," was articulated by many teachers in many schools as they spoke of their principals. Teachers felt supported with adequate instructional materials and relevant staff development. Similarly, principals often indicated that they felt supported by their superintendents and central office colleagues. As well, there was often strong support from the community through volunteer activities and school-business partnerships. As such, the mission seemed to be shared by everyone. There seemed to be little doubt that a school would be successful in improving achievement because everyone (including teachers, support staff, parents, central office staff, and community leaders) had a role in actualizing the school's mission.

Theme 2: <u>No Excuses</u>

Even when schools have a strong sense of mission, there are times when the mission is not achieved, when students do not learn as much or do not perform as well as expected. In such situations, the tendency might be to blame or to make excuses; however, the schools we studied did not accept excuses for failure with any student. Educators at these schools tended to believe that they could succeed with any student, regardless of the nature of the home situation, regardless of the student's previous performance or diagnosis, regardless of resource difficulties, and regardless of whatever other constraints might confront the school. Ultimately, there were no excuses for low performance.

In almost all of the 26 schools, teachers talked about students who lived in difficult situations (often related to their families' low income). However, the teachers never accepted that the difficult situation was a reason to lower their academic expectations for students. Instead the teachers often engaged in creative efforts to respond to the situation. Whether it meant having the student do his homework after school each day, calling home to provide a wake-up call on

mornings when the mother worked the night shift, allowing a student to take extra portions of lunch home in the afternoon so that she would have dinner, or modeling to a mother how to read a story to her preschool child, the school personnel evidenced a powerful "whatever it takes" attitude.

In several schools educators commented, "Money is not going to keep any child from participating." Schools were creative in finding ways to stretch their Title I budgets, to use their parent-teacher organizations to raise funds, to tie into existing community services, or to broker new support from business partners. In some cases, school personnel went as far as to use their own personal financial resources to assist students with basic needs such as food and clothing.

Similarly, a lack of resources was not accepted as an excuse for providing any less than an excellent academic program. When funds were needed for professional development activities, instructional technology, or other instructional materials educators demonstrated both persistence and creativity in "finding" the needed funds. Some schools sought new funding from state, federal, or private grant sources. Others developed new business partnerships. In many cases, schools became very deliberate in prioritizing the use of their discretionary resources, including their Title I dollars. They made tough choices and eliminated less effective expenditures so that they could afford expenditures that would more likely result in greater student achievement.

For schools in general, rules and regulations present a different type of barrier that can sometimes impede a school's ability to respond to the unique situations of students. While some schools might accept such barriers as legitimate excuses for failure, many of the schools we studied took a dramatically different approach. In essence, these educators seemed to assume that rules must be negotiable if they impair the school's ability to meet the needs of students. Principals were willing to debate with the food services director, the city fire marshall, the transportation director, or whoever seemed to be imposing a rule that did not seem to serve students well. Often, their persuasiveness and persistence were rewarded with compromises, waivers, or other efforts to relax requirements.

In schools where the motivation to achieve was so strong, one might have expected to see more blaming when results did not meet expectations; however, educators at the schools we studied did not blame their students, parents, outside forces, or each other. Instead, they reflected upon their own efforts to find opportunities to improve. Also, we saw schools celebrating their accomplishments and acknowledging the contributions of the teachers, support personnel, parents, students, and administrators who had a role in the success. At the same time, we saw thoughtful consideration of the steps that needed to be taken to build upon prior successes toward the goal of high achievement for all students.

Several effective schools studies have focused on the importance of high expectations (Texas Education Agency, 1989). The schools we studied definitely

evidenced high expectations for their students; however, they also evidenced high expectations for themselves. The school personnel knew that their students would achieve impressive results because they knew that they, as a school staff, would take whatever steps were necessary to ensure each student's success. Repeatedly, school staff evidenced a willingness to work diligently for long hours, often beyond the requests of their supervisors. Educators defined their jobs based on what needed to be done to reach challenging goals, not by traditional job descriptions and not by traditional notions of work days or work weeks.

Theme 3: Experimentation

Closely related to the "no excuses" theme, we found the 26 schools to be places where careful experimentation was encouraged. Educators felt such strong responsibility for ensuring the academic success of students that they eagerly sought ways to improve teaching and learning. If an approach was not working with one student or any group of students, teachers were allowed, encouraged, and even expected, to try different approaches. Thus, experimentation flourished as individual teachers, grade-level teams, site-based decision-making teams, and entire school staffs considered new ways to stimulate the achievement of students.

Educators were very careful in their choice of experiments. They evidenced a great sense of responsibility for selecting courses of action that had a high likelihood of leading to improved student performance. Nonetheless, when experiments did not lead to the desired result, we did not see reprisals or negative consequences. Instead, educators were expected to use the failure experience as part of the improvement process. Teachers and other school staff had the opportunity to make a good try, fail, learn from the experience, and make modifications or refinements that led to improved results. Thus, educators often exuded optimism about eventually getting every student to attain the highest standards of performance.

Experimentation was evident at many levels. Schools often engaged in pilot tests of materials or strategies before considering adoptions by the entire school. Schools experimented with the organization of the school day, the acquisition and use of technology, the use of intersessions, and the assignment of support staff. Teachers often shared and cooperated in each other's experiments and dialogued about their findings. They learned from each other's successes and failures.

As teachers and administrators engaged in experimentation, they also encouraged students to experiment and identify new ways to accomplish tasks. Teachers often helped students feel that it was acceptable to try new ideas and approaches. If the approach failed, school personnel were there to assist the student in refining the approach. Thus, students were taught that failure is just a step that sometimes precedes success.

Theme 4: Inclusivity: Everyone is Part of the Solution

In the schools we studied, it seemed that everyone who might possibly come in contact with a student was a partner in ensuring that student's academic success. Job titles did not matter as much as one's potential to contribute. Thus, teachers at all grade levels in both regular and special programs, professional support personnel such as nurses and counselors, bus drivers, campus administrators, custodians, school office staff, cafeteria workers, instructional aides, librarians, parent volunteers, part-time personnel, community leaders, and students were often enlisted to be a part of the team that would lead a student to success at school. As such, everyone who worked at the school, attended the school, or sent children to attend the school had a strong sense of ownership.

Beyond their traditional designated roles, school personnel had broader roles as members of the school team. It was not unusual to see secretaries listening to students read, special education teachers problem-solving instructional strategies with grade-level teams of general classroom teachers, or librarians supporting parental involvement initiatives. The broadly defined roles allowed many individuals to assume leadership roles. In several schools, everyone on the staff was part of at least one committee and most of the staff chaired a committee at some time during the year.

Effective schools studies (Texas Education Agency, 1989) and schoolwide program studies (Schenck & Beckstrom, 1993; U. S. Department of Education, 1994)) have placed considerable focus on the importance of parental involvement. At the schools we visited, school personnel did not wait passively for parents to become involved in various aspects of the school. In almost all of the schools there was a multi-faceted outreach to families that constantly encouraged and supported parents in ways that nurtured greater involvement in their children's education. Educators made special efforts to make parents feel welcome. Open-door policies and open-door attitudes were common. School personnel assumed responsibility for creating an environment in which parents wanted to become involved.

Often, in these schools, students were utilized as important resources for improving their own and each other's academic achievement. Students had important roles in directing their learning experiences and had input into a variety of decisions that influenced their school experience. Additionally, students often were involved in cooperative learning or peer tutoring strategies in which they worked together to facilitate their learning.

Theme 5: Sense of Family

Beyond the inclusivity evidenced by the schools we studied, we observed a powerful sense of family. Not only were students, parents, and all school personnel included as a part of the team, they were also included as part of the school family. Overwhelmingly, the most common metaphor we observed in the schools was the school as a family. Statements such as "We're a family here," or "These are all my children," were heard frequently. Moreover, the actions of teachers, principals, students, parents, and other members of the school community frequently reflected the concern, dedication, involvement, respect, and love that one would expect to find in the healthiest of families. The school personnel saw the school less as an institution and more as a family.

In the schools we visited, students were treated with respect and concern. Teachers were concerned with the child's total development, not simply with student performance on the TAAS. As such, we saw considerable attention to areas of endeavor beyond the traditional academics, in areas such as music, art, or physical education. Similarly, attention was given to the social and emotional needs of students. Counselors, nurses, social workers, and family liaisons often took leadership roles in ensuring that students' basic needs were met. Traditional school roles were often blurred because educators were willing to do whatever was needed to ensure that their students were doing well physically, emotionally, and socially.

In many ways, the schools strove to communicate to students that they were valued individually and collectively. School activities, bulletin boards, and curriculum materials reflected and celebrated the cultural and linguistic diversity of the students. Similarly, hallways, classrooms, doors, and ceilings were often used to display student work. School personnel often created opportunities to recognize the academic and non-academic accomplishments of students. Students did not need to misbehave to get attention because school staff were engaged in so many efforts to attend to the positive contributions of students.

Students were treated with respect and courtesy. Like family, the school provided a safe place for students to grow and learn responsibility. School personnel were able to empathize with students and relate to their personal experiences. In many of the schools, teachers and other staff grew up in the same neighborhoods and had similar backgrounds. Adults at the schools acted in ways that showed that they were happy that the students were there. When disciplinary issues arose (which generally seemed rare), the issues were handled consistently, quickly, fairly, and in a manner that still demonstrated respect for the individual student. Although consistent, school personnel still recognized that there were situations when the rules did not seem appropriate. In such cases, school personnel chose to sacrifice consistency for the sake of a child, instead of the opposite.

Also, respect for students was reflected in a tendency to avoid or minimize the use of labels. When teachers grouped students, they were careful to avoid

stigmatizing students. Thus, groupings were often heterogeneous or they were sufficiently fluid to avoid labeling. Special programs were often located or organized in ways that minimized the separation or stigmatization of students.

Just as students were treated as valued members of the school family, so were their parents. In many of the schools, parents were provided a special place to help make them comfortable when they came to school. To help make sure that parents felt at home, office staff, principals, teachers, and other school personnel greeted parents warmly, usually by name. Parents at these schools knew they were welcome; they knew that they belonged as part of the school family.

It is hard to feel like a family member if you cannot understand the language. Therefore, school personnel made many efforts to accommodate parents who did not speak English. Bilingual office staff, the frequent use of interpreters, bilingual signs and banners throughout the school, and bilingual newsletters were among the strategies used to help parents feel comfortable at school, even when they could not speak English. Similarly, the tone and words used to communicate with parents was often one that reflected respect for the parents' language, dialect, and background. Teachers did not expect parents to understand educational jargon nor did they talk to parents in ways that were condescending.

Even when parents were having difficulty assuming traditional parenting roles, school personnel responded in ways that demonstrated their respect for the challenging situations parents faced. Teachers seemed to be able to empathize with the difficulties faced by some parents, and supported parents as they worked to improve their involvement in their child's academic life. School personnel focused more on seeking solutions than on blaming parents for the academic or social difficulties that students encountered.

The sense of family extended beyond students and parents to all members of the school staff. At the schools we studied, all school personnel, regardless of position or tenure, were perceived as important members of the school family. New teachers were valued for their fresh ideas and perspectives. Veteran teachers were valued for their experience and expertise. The importance of each staff member was based in part on his or her contribution to the mission of the school, but moreover, their importance was based on their worth as an individual. Staff members cared about each other's lives beyond the school, in addition to caring about their performance at the school.

Often principals took a lead role in finding a variety of ways to let school personnel know that they were appreciated and respected. School personnel were acknowledged for their accomplishments, their expertise, and just for their membership as part of the school family. Each of the schools found ways to utilize both the personal and professional strengths of staff members, often beyond their traditional job descriptions.

As in any family, there were concerns, hurt feelings, and disagreements; however, the areas of disagreement were usually much smaller than the areas of agreement. When there were hurt feelings, people were quick to respond in ways that re-affirmed the value of the individual to the entire school family.

One of the characteristics that make these schools seem more like big families is the absence of an "us" versus "them" attitude. All of the members of the school family worked to support each other. There was a powerful sense of belonging evidenced by students, parents, teachers, support personnel, and administrators. The school family was a support network that included many smaller support networks. The strong support of the networks enabled many students, teachers, parents, and other school staff to transcend difficult situations and achieve impressive successes.

Theme 6: Collaboration and Trust

Whereas theme four focused on the ways in which students, families, and school personnel were considered part of the team that would accomplish the school's mission, and theme five focused on the ways in which students, families, and school personnel were treated as valued members of the school family, this next theme focuses primarily on the way in which school personnel worked and learned together. Clearly, there is overlap because both the emphasis on inclusion and the sense of family influence the way school personnel work together. Nonetheless, the ways in which educators were working together, in cooperation and trust, seemed to substantially influence their success.

The importance of collaboration was emphasized in other studies of effective schoolwide programs (U. S. Department of Education, 1994). In the schools we studied, openness, honesty, and trust characterized most of the interactions among school personnel. School personnel openly shared concerns and successes with each other. They provided assistance to each other and learned from each other. Teachers seemed to prefer working in teams and did so frequently. Team teaching arrangements were used often. Thus, when problems arose, school staff generally did not need to respond alone. They had colleagues who helped discuss issues and provide ideas, feedback, and encouragement.

Although there was collaboration, there was also disagreement. Teachers and other school personnel frequently reported that they felt free to express their concerns about ideas or actions, without fear of reprisal. There were opportunities for staff to disagree and work out their disagreements in constructive manners. Although the schools typically acted as teams, they still respected each individuals right to disagree.

The openness of the collaborations allowed many teachers to feel comfortable sharing their areas of weakness. Often, teams of teachers helped compensate for each others' weaknesses. Teachers frequently explained partnerships that started

with statements such as, "If you can help me with my math lessons, I'll help you with social studies."

Cooperation at these schools extended beyond their grade-span groupings. Frequently, teachers worked with those who taught subsequent grade levels to improve their understanding of each other's curricula and expectations. Even when the next grade level was at a different school, teachers often assumed responsibility for reaching out and establishing the collaborative relationships that would allow them to better ensure their students' future success.

Administrators at these schools made sure that teachers and other school personnel had many opportunities to collaborate and work together. There were many formal and informal forums that provided school personnel with opportunities to openly discuss programs, policies, and programs. School personnel were encouraged to express their concerns freely, without fear of reprisal. Similarly, administrators often took responsibility for ensuring that teachers had the time to meet and plan together. Often school personnel credited administrators for setting the tone that helped the school become a place where staff worked well together toward common goals.

Theme 7: Passion for Learning and Growing

What happens when a teacher sets a challenging goal for a group of students and the students achieve the goal? What happens when the entire school establishes a difficult goal and achieves it? At the schools we visited, many lofty goals had been set and attained. Yet, we did not see people "resting on their laurels." We did not see people becoming complacent with their current ways of teaching, organizing, or leading. Although schools clearly took time to celebrate their successes, there was almost an immediate redefinition of higher goals. School staff continued to challenge and push themselves toward the attainment of even higher goals. Teachers sometimes expressed concerns about ceiling effects and similar measurement phenomena, but the "no excuses" attitude discussed in Theme 2 generally prevailed. Despite those concerns, school personnel continued working to improve teaching and learning.

The experimentation discussed in Theme 3 did not stop when the desired results were attained. Instead school staff focused on how they could improve upon strategies or identify new strategies that would allow them to succeed with even more students or that would allow them to take students to even higher levels of success. In these schools there is a continuous seeking after new horizons, new opportunities, new ways of operating. The process of such discovery and learning on the part of all participants is considered the central business of the school.

Planning for improvement is perpetual. At the schools we visited, there is an unyielding belief that improvement is possible. The pressure to improve was

almost totally self-imposed. Yet, these schools were more focused on improving their performance than some schools with dramatically less success. We describe this phenomenon as a passion for growing and learning.

To actualize their improvement plans, school personnel were almost always engaged in learning activities. Professional development was not an event at these schools: it was part of the culture, part of the way of life. In the schools we studied, we frequently found school personnel engaged in extensive efforts to bring new information into the school. Federal, state, and local resources were used to send staff to attend conferences, to visit highly effective schools, and to critically observe promising programs. At the same time, teachers and other personnel shared journal articles and discussed educational literature that enriched their discussions about how to improve.

The frequent analysis of data (as discussed in Theme 1) allowed teachers to learn from their own practice, and the regular collaborations (as discussed in Theme 6) often led school personnel to adopt approaches that built upon the successes of individual teachers or groups of teachers. Thus, teachers and other school personnel were often learning as much about teaching as their students were learning about reading, mathematics, and other areas of the school curriculum.

It was easy to see how the educators' passion for learning and growing had been transmitted to students. Students exhibited both confidence in their ability to improve and eagerness to grow intellectually. Similarly, parents were often engaged in learning activities. In most of the schools, parents participated in formal and informal efforts to improve their capacity to assist the school in ensuring their child's academic success. Thus, the inclusivity described in Theme 4 is an important element in the passion for learning and growing.

These schools can truly be characterized as communities of learners. As school personnel learned and grew, so did parents, and so did students. Learning, growing, and improving were the focus of thousands of interactions among students, parents, and school personnel. Nonetheless, these schools did not fail to remember that every participant in the community of learners was first an individual, an important and valued member of the school family. This constant reaffirmation, support, and validation (as described in Theme 5) was probably responsible for individuals finding the strength to confront daunting barriers, overcome those barriers, achieve impressive goals, and then re-focus their sights on even higher goals for student performance.

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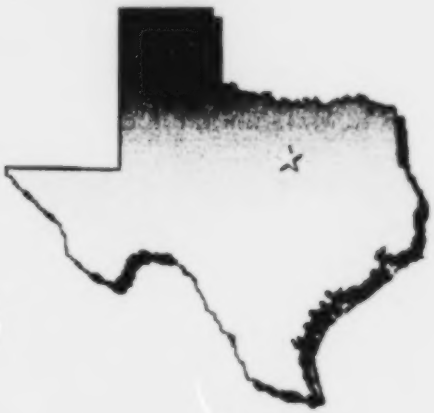
Successful Texas Schoolwide Programs:

School Profiles

Adams Elementary School, Cleburne ISD, Cleburne, Texas
Ina Lee Roden, Principal / James R. Grunert, Superintendent



Demographics

Grade Span 1-5
Number of Students Enrolled 338
Percent Attendance 95.7%
Ethnicity of Students
- 2.2% African-American
- 17% Hispanic
- 80.8 % White

Percent Receiving Free or Reduced Price Lunch 52.5%
Percent of Students with Emerging English Proficiency 5.4%

Other Awards/Recognition

TEA Recognized School, 1994-95
Chapter I Commended School, 1994-95

Results

Percent passing 1994-95 TAAS
- 77.8% Reading
- 95.5% Writing
- 84% Math

"It is a friendly place to work as well as to learn".
—1st & 2nd grade team

"We are not in competition with each other, and I don't think we are in competition with other schools. We worry about what goes on in this school and we do the best we can do right here."
—1st & 2nd grade team

Adams Elementary School is located about 25 miles south of Fort Worth, Texas. The town is growing and changing due to the migration of families from the neighboring metroplex, as well as changes in the railroad and steel industries, major employers in the area. The tree-lined road into town from the south, however, is reminiscent of the area's pastoral agricultural days, winding among green fields, cattle grazing, and bluebonnets and other wildflowers in bloom.

Adams Elementary School is on a quiet side street on the edge of town. Older frame homes, some in good repair, some not, dominate the neighborhood near the school. The playground fence separates the school from a large pasture. The school consists of an older two-story building that houses the school offices and classrooms with several newer brick classroom buildings, a cafeteria, and one portable building arranged to the back and side. Towering pecan trees shade the parking area and the playground. Many of the interior halls have murals painted on the walls, and the portable building has a mural of a stereotypical old schoolhouse with a school bell on the wall facing the neighboring houses. A local artist painted the mural one summer, with neighborhood children watching. The artist asked the children what should be added to the

mural. One child suggested a burro, so there is a burro painted into the schoolyard mural.

"We call ourselves the Adams family," said the principal, Mrs. Roden. The atmosphere of family pervades the school. Teachers and children are calm though purposeful, and a sense of peacefulness and comfort pervades. Mrs. Roden gives much credit to the school secretary, the first person she hired when she was assigned to Adams. Mrs. Roden explained, [The office] "is filled with kids every day. She [the secretary] set the tone for the whole school." The secretary established a warm, personal atmosphere in the office that then flowed throughout the rest of the school.

"They made me feel very welcome. It's just like having a big, happy family."
—New third grade teacher

Two years ago the school faced a challenge when the district was re-zoned, and elementary children from a more privileged area were moved to Adams, doubling the enrollment. A parent related her experiences with the re-zoning: "I was really sure that we were going to have to rent or buy a home elsewhere in this district, because there was no way that this school was going to be able to give my children what I thought they deserved. I have never been more wrong in my life!" She went on to say, "I watched, and I realized that for the whole city, the re-zoning was the best that could be done for the children of the school district." Everyone at Adams worked hard to make every student and every family feel welcome.

Several teachers mentioned that Adams has accepted children who were not functioning well in other schools in the district. One teacher said, "We have always been known to take them. You have to give it a try. In most of the situations it has been pretty positive. It takes lots of patience, plus stability. We really care. We really do care." Another teacher related, "I had a student that they brought over here who was from another school who could not handle it at the other school. [He] was always in trouble. We had no problems with him here."

In the Adams family, teachers support each other through teamwork and ongoing collaborative efforts. Teachers work together in teams to select and adjust curriculum and improve instructional practices to meet the changing needs of their students. The first and second grade teachers are gradually implementing a primary learning center, where first and second grades work together. They have also added "Gator Time" (Giving All To Obtain/Retain Skills), an intense instructional period that replaces a time slot teachers agreed had not been used well.

The collaborative spirit at Adams is nurtured by a principal who provides teachers the freedom to experiment and try out their ideas. One teacher said of the principal, "She is very open minded about most things and encourages new ideas. It might be a great one, then again, it might not be so great, but she is willing to let you work it out, to see how it goes."

At Adams teachers have used this opportunity to experiment well. Teachers carefully consider how they construct learning opportunities to ensure the success of all children. They are constantly engaged in learning about how to improve their craft and they share their learning with their colleagues in ways that have enhanced the effectiveness of the entire school.

"We use so many things, phonics and whole language, and put it all together and make our own program. That's what we have done. We are easing them into it a little bit at a time, a little more and a little more, to see how it works. So far it is good."
—First and second grade teachers

Apple Springs Elementary School, Apple Springs ISD, Apple Springs, Texas
Leroy Spencer, Principal / Dr. J. Floyd Worley, Superintendent

Demographics

Grade Span K-6
Number of Students Enrolled 95
Percent Attendance 97.3%
Ethnicity of Students
18.9% African-American
81.1% White
Percent Receiving Free or Reduced Price Lunch 68%
Percent of Students with Emerging English Proficiency 0%

Other Awards/Recognition

University Interscholastic League District 18A Academics Winner, 1996

Results

Percent passing 1994-95 TAAS
87.2% Reading
90% Writing
79.5% Math

"We are in the business of success. We are not in the business of failure. So what does it take to make a kid successful? Whatever it is, is what we need to do."
- Superintendent

"We have a kind of grass roots community. People have been living on the same farm for two or three generations. The men worked together, black and white, since years ago. They cut pulpwood together, cut logs together, farmed together."
—Principal

Apple Springs Elementary School is located in the Davy Crockett National Forest deep in the piney woods of East Texas. A pleasant 20 minute drive along highway 94 separates Apple Springs from Lufkin, Texas, the nearest large town. Blooming vines and under-story trees provided glimpses of white and yellow against the deep green background of towering pine trees. Along the road, sandy driveways lead to small frame homes, mobile homes tucked among the towering trees, and occasional small businesses that also appear to be community gathering places.

The main building of the school is rock and was built in 1940. The building was totally remodeled during the spring and summer of 1996 to restore the building and make it meet the educational needs of the 21st century. On the left is a more modern one-story concrete-block wing that serves as the elementary school. The high school, serving grades 7 - 12, is in the rock building. The principal's office is in a small, new building located between the elementary wing and the original school. The entire school has been renovated, with the elementary rooms having built-in cupboards designed by the teachers, new carpet, and paint. The original rock structure was restored to appear from the outside as it originally looked, but totally rebuilt on the inside to meet future needs.

The school building has been an integral part of the Apple Springs community since it was built in 1940. With the help of several large grants from Temple Inland Industries, the largest taxpayer and major employer in the district, prudent budgeting by the district, and a recent tax increase, the facilities are being renovated and the school library improved. The "Old Timers," graduates from the 1940's and 1950's, have an annual reunion at the school on the third Saturday in October. People drove from as far away as North Carolina to attend the reunion last year. The younger graduates have a homecoming in connection with a sports event. The "Old Timers" wanted to make a contribution to the restored building, and have installed an expensive chandelier for the entry foyer.

Because of its size, everyone in the community knows each other. Several of the school staff grew up here, graduated, went away to college, then came back to live and raise their families. Mr. Spencer was hired as principal of both the high school and elementary school four years ago. He grew up, and has always lived, in the community, although he attended the then-separate school for African Americans. The school board demonstrated a commitment to unifying the ethnic groups of the community through this personnel decision.

"We are more like family. Our children are taught at home and at school to care for each other."

—Parent

Several factors contribute to a close, personal relationship between teachers and students at Apple Springs. The district has chosen to keep one teacher for each grade level at this school, even though some classes have as few as ten students, less than one half the minimum number Texas law allows up to grade four. The newest teacher at the school has been there for five years. When the principal was asked why he thought teachers stayed at the school so long, he said, "They are really happy here. It is because of the small classroom size. They get the one-on-one with students and they really feel that closeness. They get to know the kids personally."

The smallness of the school and the low turnover rate of teachers facilitate teamwork and communication between teachers and administrators. Teachers commented about working together, "At the beginning of the year we all sit down together. We complete a worksheet that explains which children mastered which objectives, where they are weak, and what we need to work on with that student. We do this the first work day, so we will know the first day of school."

Teachers feel secure to experiment in the classroom. One teacher said, "We'll try anything. If it works [fine]. If not, we try something else." Teachers will work to identify approaches that allow each student to experience academic success.

" We can spend more time with them, do a lot more individual things. And if they are not on grade level, we find some way to help them. We don't have so many kids that we can't take the time to help the ones that are low academically."

—Teacher

Professional development has helped create a culture of continuous learning at Apple Springs. Teachers learn from studying their strengths and needs; they learn from participating in professional development activities; they learn from implementing new ideas; and they learn from each other as they share their successes and frustrations.

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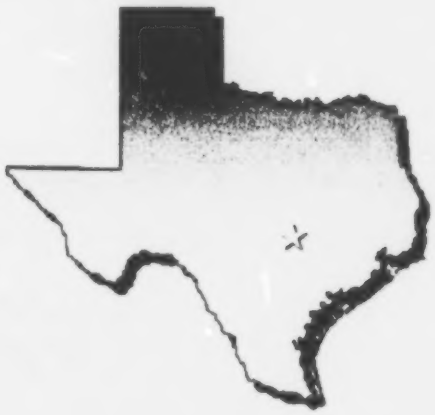
T.A. Brown Elementary School, Austin ISD, Austin, Texas
Mrs. Leticia C. Hinojosa, Principal / Dr. James H. Fox Jr., Superintendent



Demographics

Grade Span PreK-5
Number of Students Enrolled 543
Percent Attendance 96.6%
Ethnicity of Students
18.6% African-American
71.1% Hispanic
9.6 % White
.07 Pacific Islander
Percent Receiving Free or Reduced Price Lunch 90.8%
Percent of Students with Emerging English Proficiency 43.1%

Other Awards/Recognition

TEA Title I Commended School, 1995-96
Title I Best Practices School

Results

Percent passing 1994-95 TAAS
71.3% Reading
87.1% Writing
70.1% Math

"We are a family here. Maybe we're not perfect; we're far from it, but we're good and getting better. It's a team effort." —Principal Hinojosa

"The Parent Liaison really gets after you. She'll even pick us up if we need a ride to parent meetings. You just can't say no to her. She just loves her job—she beams! And they have baby sitters to watch the kids while we come to the meetings!" —Parent

T.A. Brown Elementary School is located north of downtown Austin, near a major highway interchange. The school sits on a small rise just off the street and offers a view of the extensive highway construction in progress. As one drives up to the well-kept brick complex, one escapes the hectic bustle of the throughways and enters into a more peaceful, protected zone. This feeling intensifies as one walks into the clean and shiny halls of the school.

Colorful student work adorns the walls. There are displays of brightly painted African masks, large Japanese fans, a rainforest scene replete with thick foliage and a myriad of wild animals, a huge ocean scene, and a collection of student writing and artwork entitled, "An African Story Told In Writing and Pictures." The walls provide evidence of both the creativity and intensity through which learning is pursued. Also, the walls give evidence of the way in which the culture and experiences of students are valued.

Throughout the school signs and banners offer encouragement and express high expectations in both English and Spanish. For instance, one large banner challenged students, "Lee y Triunfa - Read and Succeed." Whereas another announced a display of student progress by stating,

"Miren Cuanto." After a visit to Brow Elementary, one might conclude that anything is possible. Teachers and administrators carefully consider the needs of the school and the students, then relentlessly pursue the resources to achieve those needs through the use of both school district and community resources. For instance, the Texas Association of School Boards, Southwestern Bell, a local automobile dealership, the County Constable's Office and Austin Interfaith are all organizations that play a role in the success of students at Brown.

The Campus Leadership Team helps the staff "to set common goals and plans to meet them...CLT, they're the heart of the school."
--Teacher

The teachers and staff at Brown pursue the involvement of parents with as much vigor and determination as they pursue the involvement of community groups and businesses. Parents are treated in ways that make them feel welcome and encouraged to be a part of the everyday life of the school. Classes in areas of interest to parents are offered both during the day and in the evening. Many parents are able to take part because baby-sitting is provided.

Commitment to the shared mission of success for every child is evident in the enthusiastic implementation of an after-school enrichment program for students, supported by the Austin Interfaith Council. These activities help develop skills and interests that inspire and motivate students while also integrating academic skills. Classes are offered every Monday and Friday in such areas as French, Drama for Kids, In-Line Skating, Can Do Magic, Choir For Kids, Computer Fun, and Cross-stitch. Any and all students who wish can enroll in the program that begins with a snack at 2:45 and the class of their choice from 3:00 until 4:30. The school staff worked through a maze of obstacles such as transportation schedules, staffing issues, and funding concerns to make the program work.

"I didn't know where my kid was but I knew she was on the bus. I knew she was OK because I trust the driver. She's great...So I didn't worry. It's like there are lots of people watching out for my kid." **--Parent**

At Brown there is a clear focus on getting each and every child to master the objectives of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). However, the staff recognizes that students need a broad base of educational experiences extending far beyond the mathematics, reading, and writing assessed by the TAAS. Thus, time is devoted to physical education, art, science, and other areas of academic endeavor, often in ways that tie back to concepts assessed on the TAAS. For instance, while the art teacher was leading first and second grade students in an origami lesson she recognized the opportunity to reinforce the concept of symmetry, as presented in the mathematics curriculum.

T.A. Brown teachers go to great lengths to strengthen their academic program. There is a willingness to explore options and make changes that are likely to result in improved academic achievement. For example, the principal and staff carefully considered the idea of moving teachers to different grade levels to take better advantage of their strengths. Conveying a spirit of experimentation a teacher added, "We won't know if this strategy really works until we see the data. We'll continue or not, depending on the results." About these and other changes Mrs. Hinojosa reflects, "We've gone through a lot of changes here at Brown in the last few years. We're working to facilitate the changing of the school to better fit the kids. It's a team."

Boys Ranch High School, Boys Ranch ISD, Boys Ranch, Texas

Larry White, Principal / Hayden W.Willhite, Superintendent

Demographics

Grade Span 9-12
Number of Students Enrolled 271
Percent Attendance 97.7%
Ethnicity of Students
- 4.8% African-American
- 7.7% Hispanic
- 86% White
- 1.1% Native American
- 0.4% Pacific Islander

Percent Receiving Free or Reduced Price Lunch 93%
Percent of Students with Emerging English Proficiency 0%

Results

Percent passing 1994-95 TAAS
- 84.5% Reading
- 81% Writing
- 74.1% Math

"You have to be flexible. You have to be able to laugh, sometimes at yourself. You can't be easily intimidated. You can't be afraid or unable to express that you care, either by the way you act, or sometimes by the way you have to say it. You have to look out for their interests and feelings." **--English teacher**

"The interlock with the ranch is total....It is a team situation."
--Principal.

Boys Ranch High School is part of an independent school district located on the grounds of Cal Farley's Boys Ranch, a more than 10,000 acre Ranch that provides a home for boys and girls in the arid yet picturesque bluffs 45 miles northwest of Amarillo. The original 120 acres of land on which Boys Ranch is situated was donated in 1939 to give "troubled boys" a "second chance at success."

The Ranch complex is like a little town, with over 60 modern buildings, paved streets, some homes with yards, livestock and agriculture, small fishing ponds, a modern athletic complex with natatorium, gymnasium, playing field and track, auto shop, and chapel. Besides the regular academic buildings (elementary, junior high and high schools and dining hall), there is a ranch office with a visitor center, post office, student bank, snack bar and store.

Arcing behind the high school are the homes where the students live. They are ranch-style houses with the donor's name above each door. The building trades teacher is working with his team of students to build the class's second home on the ranch. As many as sixteen students live in each with one adult couple as primary house parents and another as alternate. Girls also live and study on the ranch, albeit in fewer numbers.

(There is a separate "Girlstown" outside of Lubbock.) Girls were brought in to prevent the separation of families, so that brothers and sisters could live and study together on the Ranch. The intense closeness of the community of the Ranch produces a feeling of family and trust based upon teamwork.

"There is a closeness out here that you are probably not going to find in a normal setting."
– Trades teacher

The sense of family at Boys Ranch is very strong. Many teachers have taught there for a long time; the average tenure of the teachers is eleven years. Many of the teachers and staff live on the Ranch itself, and teachers speak about the importance of attending extracurricular activities to show their support for the students.

The relationship between teachers and students often extends beyond traditional teacher-pupil roles. The building trades teacher explained his role with a student he mentored: "If he has questions and he feels like he can relate to me-; my door is always open to him. All students are going to have some problems in one area or another and they need someone to visit with-not so much on a counselor level, but kind of as a daddy would do a son. Like I say, these students are away from family."

House parents are encouraged to participate closely in the children's educational lives. They sit on school planning committees and can attend the same staff development workshops that teachers attend. Living in the same community facilitates communication between parents and teachers, and teachers often call the homes or meet socially with the parents.

Mutual trust and respect among staff and students are fundamental binding values at Boys Ranch. The staff believe that continuously building, renewing, and demonstrating trust contributes to self-esteem and academic excellence. Superintendent Willhite explained, "There is no such thing as just being accepted, even though you are a superintendent, or teacher, or anything. You have to do it on a one-to-one basis by being there for the kid....If you can be there when they need you, then they think back to the times when you were there, 'You have been there all along, haven't you?'...It has implications for every high school."

"I love dealing with these kids because you get kids in there that have never thought there was a chance in the world of making anything of themselves. And maybe they thought they could never be loved by anybody. And you get to see them open up and bloom. And they find out that they are smart."
– English resource teacher

There is a general sense that the students at the school are unique; that they are especially creative and bright because of their particular circumstances. Teachers explained that they are not interested in problems from the children's past, and focus upon obtaining success in the present. Most students are behind academically when they come to the ranch, so great effort is expended on accelerating academic progress. The seven to one ratio between teachers and students allows staff to devote time to ensuring that instruction is tailored to meet the individual needs of students. The low teacher-pupil ratio is not unique among schools serving similar populations; however, the commitment is to use the low ratio to promote high levels of academic achievement and to create an environment in which all students feel they are valued.

Kate Burgess Elementary, Wichita Falls ISD, Wichita Falls, Texas
Gail Taylor, Principal / Dr. Leslie V. Carnine, Superintendent

Demographics

Grade Span: PreK-6
Number of Students Enrolled: 490
Percent Attendance: 96.3%
Ethnicity of Students:
- 53.3% African-American
- 9.8% Hispanic
- 34.1 White
- 0.8% Native American
- 2% Pacific Islander

Percent Receiving Free or Reduced Price Lunch: 83.5%
Percent of Students with Emerging English Proficiency: 0.4%

Other Awards/Recognition

U.S. Department of Education Certificate of Merit for Outstanding Performance, 1994
Texas Education Agency Title I Certificate of Commendation, 1995
Total Quality School, Wichita Falls ISD, 1996

Results

Percent passing 1994-95 TAAS:
- 77.2% Reading
- 59.5% Writing
- 80.1% Math

"I really enjoy working with parents. The kids really need time with their parents, so I do whatever I can to get them involved." — Teacher

"We don't teach the way a book would have us teach. Instruction is adapted to the needs of students. — Teacher

At Kate Burgess Elementary in Wichita Falls, teachers make learning challenging and fun. The administrators make teaching a goal-oriented, professional endeavor that utilizes the creativity and intelligence of teachers. The entire school staff works together to help families and students feel a sense of belonging and know they are valued members of the Burgess School community

In this small city, just a few miles from the Texas/Oklahoma border, a lot of time and effort has been devoted to creating a pleasant environment that is conducive to student learning. This is evidenced outside of each classroom in colorful displays that illustrate the achievements of students. In the morning announcements it is evidenced as the principal reads the long list of students acknowledged for their success in the Red Hot Readers Program. In one of the sixth grade classrooms, it is made readily apparent by the wide array of live animals in the room and the motivational approaches to science and other curricular areas. In a first grade classroom it (the list) is found hanging on the clothesline. Throughout the school, the Burgess team of educators has made learning both rigorous and fun.

One of the teachers revealed that the pleasant atmosphere goes beyond the surroundings when she told how the principal and assistant principal meet with each child individually and take the time to get to know them. "The kids feel important," she said. "They know they are special and they are real people. It relates to everything they do, even away from school."

The improvements in curriculum have not occurred by accident. Both formal and informal professional development activities have facilitated improvements. Teachers spend a lot of time working together and learning from each other. Grade level teams plan together and benefit from each other's ideas. Also, more formal professional development activities give teachers opportunities to explore new options. "We don't believe that there is one right way to do anything," explained Mrs. Taylor, the principal. When the literature-based reading program proved inadequate for some students, the staff explored, experimented with, and adopted a structured phonics approach that they felt would appropriately supplement their other reading approaches. Clearly the principal has made teachers believe that their ideas make a difference. Although the principal seems to initiate many ideas herself, teachers feel that they have the opportunity and encouragement to carefully consider options, experiment, and improve their practice accordingly.

"I expect a lot of the kids. Sometimes I think I expect too much. But, then I work harder and try new things. Then, they prove to me that they really can do what I expected."

— Teacher

"We all work together with the same goal," a teacher said. "With the schoolwide tutoring we know where each child is on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) objectives. All doors are open and we share with one another. We all want to improve the TAAS scores."

"One of my students was having trouble with his homework and she [the parent] was unable to help him. I told her times that I am available, so she comes in whenever she can. Today I was teaching her some techniques to use with fractions. I really enjoy doing that. The kids really need that time with their parents, so I do what I can to get them involved.

— Teacher

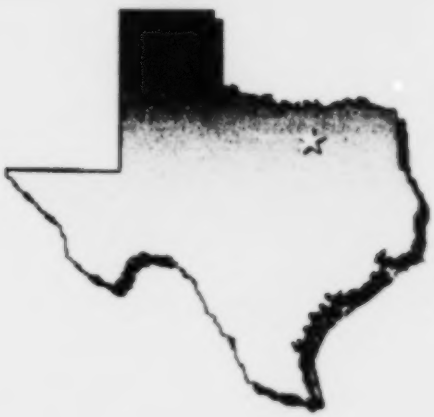
The implementation of successful programs at Burgess comes with the involvement of families and many community members. At Burgess, parents and community members literally have a place at the table. In the lunchroom, a checkered tablecloth and flowers decorates the table where community volunteers come to eat with their "adopted" child. Parents are also invited to come in for lunch with their children. The tutoring program utilizes instructional aides and volunteers to better individualize instruction during key times in the school day. Teachers use a variety of approaches to maintain effective and positive communication with parents. Parents seem to recognize and appreciate the sincere caring demonstrated by Burgess staff members. In response, many parents have signed on as part of the team that is making Burgess an exciting place for children to learn and grow.

Two things are key. First you have to be positive. Second, never make fun of a child: It cuts to the bone.

— Teacher

C.F. Carr Elementary, Dallas ISD, Dallas, Texas

Jean Dixon, Principal / Dr. Chad Woolery, Superintendent



Demographics

Grade Span PreK - 3
Number of Students Enrolled 389
Percent Attendance 96.7% in 1994
Ethnicity of Students
69.4% African-American
30.1% Hispanic
0.5% White
Percent Receiving Free or Reduced Price Lunch 95.4%
Percent of Students with Emerging English Proficiency 24.7%

Other Awards/Recognition

Texas Successful School
Dallas School of Excellence

Results

Percent passing 1994-95 TAAS
86.2% Reading
N/A Writing
71.4% Math

"We want to ensure that every child leaves here with a solid academic foundation. They say, 'The deeper the base, the taller the building.' Here at Carr we are master builders developing a solid early childhood foundation to enable our students to be successful in the higher grades." —Principal

"I look for their strengths because it uplifts them." —Second grade teacher

At Carr Elementary School in Dallas, Texas the focus is positive, emphasizing respect for each child and each child's potential. Shiny hardwood floors, fresh paint on the walls of the hallways, brightly colored lockers, and decorated classroom doors all reflect a commitment to the creation of a positive learning environment that nurtures the growth of every child.

Administrators and staff make a conscientious effort to identify and build upon the strengths of each child. Teachers look for strengths in academic areas as well as other areas of endeavor. Once strengths are found, teachers find ways to acknowledge them in ways that build the confidence of students. One teacher explained, "I just observe the child in the classroom, playground, cafeteria settings, and go from there. I noticed a student who had a nice speaking voice. I told him that I wanted him to do a little skit over the intercom. Then I told him I wanted him to be in the oratorical contest. He is an excellent speaker."

Associated with the focus on strengths is the establishment of high expectations for every child. Teachers believe that their children will achieve at high levels if they are provided with learning experiences that

will allow them to succeed. Thus, there is a strong focus on adapting instruction and materials in ways that allow all children to attain high standards.

As the demographics surrounding Carr have changed, the school has strengthened the bilingual program so that the home language of the children is supported as they make the transition to English. A prekindergarten teacher said, "The goal of our bilingual program is to build the student's conceptual knowledge in their native language to bridge a smoother transition into English academic proficiency. This approach of a hand-in-hand language program ensures a successful transition into the mainstream of English proficiency without exterminating their native language." Several of the teachers mentioned participating in the district "Grow Your Own" program, that encourages teachering assistants to finish college and get their teaching certificate. One teacher describes her extensive experience at Carr and told what the program had done for her, "It was great! I tell you, I have worked in the classroom as a teaching assistant, I've worked in the office as a secretary and clerk, I have been in Chapter 1, I have worked with textbooks. All of that exposed me to several different aspects of the school. That helped me a great deal when I took those exit tests." The students and the school also benefit from having a teacher who knows the parents and the neighborhood so well.

"We have high expectations of the children. We target what they need to learn, not just the material for the tests. I think we go with what each student needs rather than what the school needs. The teachers are beginning to adapt to the individual child. We consider what motivates them. We are attentive to how they think and feel in order to teach them well. They are just like us, just smaller. We have to respect them."

– Second grade teacher

At Carr, educators try to place the individual child's needs before the overall needs of the school. This, they believe, is one of the keys to motivating children to want to learn new things. When students see that learning experiences cater to their interest and strengths, motivation for learning is high and students achieve the high expectations of their teachers. A second grade teacher explained, "It all starts with the motivation. You have to motivate your kids. If it means standing in the middle of the floor and rooting them on . . . that is what we should do."

The philosophy at Carr is that the skills necessary to succeed in the third grade must be initiated in earlier grades including pre-kindergarten and kindergarten. The principal, teachers, and support staff stress that third grade teachers alone cannot be responsible for all of the child's learning. A solid foundation is necessary to maximize the likelihood that a child will leave the third grade fully prepared to be successful in fourth grade. Thus the staff at Carr share responsibility for constructing the learning opportunities that will allow every child to leave third grade well-prepared for academic, social, and personal success at the next level.

"We have to begin at prekindergarten or kindergarten. The kindergarten teachers need to understand what part they are going to play in assuring that our third graders will leave here academically astute. Every teacher must take ownership in the development of a child's education, no matter what grade level. That is the approach we have taken."

– Principal

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Cisco Elementary School, Cisco ISD, Cisco, Texas

Mary Schustereit, Principal / C. R. Saunders, Superintendent

Demographics

Grade Span PreK-5
Number of Students Enrolled 459
Percent Attendance 96.4%
Ethnicity of Students
2.8% African-American
10.7% Hispanic
86.3 % White
0.2% Native American
Percent Receiving Free or Reduced Price Lunch 65.4%
Percent of Students with Emerging English Proficiency 0.9%

Other Awards/Recognition

Governor's Certificate for the Texas Successful Schools Award for Recognized Academic Performance
TEA Title I Commended School 1994-95

Results

Percent passing 1994-95 TAAS
91% Reading
86.7% Writing
90.4% Math

"At our school we love and care about everyone"
—Banner in front hallway

"We do a lot of looking after each other. We work together, there are lots of words of encouragement."
— Teacher

A small town under a big sky, Cisco is located in the heart of rural Texas. The town is proud of its distinction of being the site of the first Hilton Hotel, but is equally proud of its schools. The elementary school is well-kept, painted in muted tones of brown and tan. These neutral colors do not detract from the student artwork covering the walls. The ceilings of the hallways are lined with black and yellow paper chains with people's names on them. The children sold these for twenty-five cents apiece, and raised more than two thousand dollars for the purchase of playground equipment.

Team spirit is strong among the staff, who support each other and the students. The community of teachers embraces and welcomes new teachers and new students. The principal knows all the students, who line up to hug her and talk to her. The staff works together to create a safe learning environment where teachers teach and children learn. The former principal, now at the junior high, stated, "My belief is to give the teachers choices, and then hold them responsible for their choices." He's blunt about his drive to create a shared vision: "It's team-building. A great percentage of the teachers got involved, though there were a few hold-

outs."

"During TAAS, the teachers who don't have to proctor the tests, monitor the halls, give tests to the special ed. kids who need special attention, have snacks ready, and take some of the pressure off the teachers giving the tests."
—2nd grade teacher

The newly appointed principal recognizes the strength and value of what was begun and resolves to build upon it. She attributes much of the success of the school to her predecessor. She has built upon the strengths of the school and has continued the momentum begun a few years before her to establish and maintain a positive school environment. The school's Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) scores reflect responsibility and commitment, but the working environment and the smiles on the students' faces indicate something more under the surface.

The mathematics TAAS scores gave evidence of substantial change. Among the choices given teachers was the option to teach more than one math curriculum. As a result, every day there are two math periods in each grade. When asked how the teachers bought into the emphasis on math, one teacher replied, "It has always been that way, we all love math."

"Our challenge is to try to get to where everyone is successful, whatever it takes."
—Teacher

There is a great emphasis on the community as well. A teacher's aide in charge of a computer lab became concerned about poor nutrition among the students who used the lab. The aide asked for and received donations of day-old bread and produce from the grocery store, and she took it to the lab. "We try to put the food out in a way that those who want it can just take it," she explained. Clothing donations are handled in the same way. Everyone feels responsible for each other, and the result is a caring environment.

A lasting impression of Cisco is the obvious high level of collaboration and trust among the teachers, some of whom attended this elementary school as students and returned to be teachers. Trust is a source of strength for the group. One of the teachers said, "We do a lot of looking after each other. We work together. There are lots of words of encouragement....I could go to anyone in this hall, and if I say I need something, if anyone has it, they'll give it to me."

The district Director of Technology is an integral part of the Cisco Elementary family. She knows all of the teachers, all of the students and is an involved staff member in addressing the needs of students as they face the TAAS. She receives lesson plans from the teachers each week and coordinates work taking place in the computer lab in order to support the work of the teachers and their students. She seems to be everywhere all the time; everywhere includes all three campuses in the district. She is unquestionably an instructional leader in the district. This district-level support brings a larger sense of community to Cisco Elementary School.

"We have got to quit putting kids in boxes. We have to take off the lid, take down the fences, and let them go."
—Former principal

East Side Elementary School, San Felipe Del Rio Consolidated ISD, Del Rio, Texas
Roberto Zaragosa, Principal / Dr. Pete Anthony, Superintendent

Demographics

Grade Span 1-5
Number of Students Enrolled 600
Percent Attendance 95.2%
Ethnicity of Students
- 2% African-American
- 83.8% Hispanic
- 14 % White
- 0.2% Native American

Percent Receiving Free or Reduced Price Lunch 77.2%
Percent of Students with Emerging English Proficiency 24.8%

Other Awards/Recognition

TEA Recognized Rating, 1993-94, 1995-96
Partnership Schools Initiative Campus, 1993-96
Title I Successful School Award, 1994-95
Above State Average Scores in Writing (84, 99, 98, 99) 1993-96
Governor's Gold Star School., 1992-95

Results

Percent passing 1994-95 TAAS
- 83% Reading
- 97.7% Writing
- 79.5% Math

We are all here for the same reason...We are here because the parents send us their best. So we have to do the best with what is brought to us." --Teacher

"Sometimes I can't sleep at night because I am so excited to come to school. The administrators here are awesome...When we need anything, they say 'go for it'. They also say, 'You are doing a good job, keep it up.' They constantly do that." --Teacher

Del Rio and the neighboring area of San Felipe together form a small town near the Mexican border. The land is flat and dusty, and often the temperature is hot. East Side Elementary School sits a few blocks off a main avenue in Del Rio. Along with the Mexican and fast food restaurants on the strip there are several large "super stores" frequented by Mexican nationals who cross over to shop. Approaching East Side one turns off this main road into a neighborhood of small houses and trailers.

When one enters the clean, brick buildings of East Side Elementary, one cannot avoid noticing the friendliness of students and staff. Everyone seems happy to be there. Many of the staff members believe that this feeling is greatly influenced by the spirit of open collaboration throughout the school.

The principal has an open-door policy that allows any staff member to go in and discuss problems and needs. Teachers know that the principal listens. One teacher commented, "Many times we disagree on things. However, I still have that familiarity...I can go in and sit down and discuss anything, in both languages [English and Spanish]." Another teacher added, "We are allowed to make mistakes, express our opinion, and be heard. Many times I think it goes back to our knowing each other for a

long time. He [the principal] knows what I am capable of doing; he knows that I will be here to help him in any way, provided that he comes through for us, too."

"You have to have that openness so that you can solve problems...The teacher has to be a counselor, mother, and an educator to every student. So does the administrator to every teacher."

–Teacher

The spirit of collaboration exhibited by the principal is emulated by other staff members. As one teacher explained, "We consult with our curriculum coordinator and she gets us anything we need. She's a friend of ours, she's helpful." Cooperation and friendliness characterize the interactions of teachers and staff members throughout the school.

An important aspect of the success of East Side Elementary has been its creative use of federal education resources to address the unique needs of their students. Project ExCell had teachers staying with a class of students for two academic years and two summer school sessions. Teachers in the program have a reduced class size (approximately fifteen students) and are encouraged to implement experimental and joint projects. Several teachers at East Side volunteered to pilot the program. They designed it so that teachers would begin with classes the summer before the first, second and third grade years (the grade levels they chose to target the first year), and stay with those children through their movement to second, third and fourth grades, respectively.

When planning the ExCell program, teachers looked at their strengths and weaknesses and divided teaching responsibilities in a way that would capitalize on their strengths. The summer portion of the program was not the traditional remediation program. Instead teachers worked to accelerate the learning of students through creative approaches that involved thematic units, cooking, and other activities that students considered fun.

After the first year, teachers were excited about continuing with their same group of students because, as a teacher explained, [it] "saves time with assessment. I know my kids well. We just kept rollin' at the beginning of the second year." The relationship between school staff and families is an important focus at East Side. One teacher said, "I couldn't get parents here my first year of teaching. Now they're here all the time. I think it's because now they feel there is a special place for their child here. And they've responded." Parents know they are welcome and understand that they are real partners with the school in helping their child learn . As a parent explained, "I have three kids here and they're all straight-A students. When the teacher had been away one kid brought home two B's. So I called the teacher at home and asked for the plans the teacher had submitted to the substitute so I could review and expand at home."

Perhaps the power of the collaborative spirit at East Side helps teachers and staff members maintain the intense level of energy that goes into their work. The support provided from other teachers, administrator, and parents makes the impossible seem reasonable. When asked how they were able to maintain such an intense program, the teachers said quite matter-of-factly, "We don't really do anything that special. [We] just give more of our time. It's nothing that anyone else couldn't do!"

The passion I bring into this job...the pride that I feel, that is very important...and the commitment."

–Teacher

A.G. Hilliard Elementary, North Forest ISD, Houston, Texas

Rufus Allen, Principal / Dr. Carrol A. Thomas, Superintendent

Demographics

Grade Span 1 - 5
Number of Students Enrolled 506
Percent Attendance 95.3%
Ethnicity of Students
99.6% African-American
0.4% Hispanic
0% White
Percent Receiving Free or Reduced Price Lunch 96.8%
Percent of Students with Emerging English Proficiency 0%

Results

Percent passing 1994-95 TAAS
85.4% Reading
93.8% Writing
82.4% Math

Other Awards/Recognition

Chapter 1 Schoolwide Excellence Award, 1994 & 1995
Texas Successful Schools Award, 1994, 1995 & 1996
National Alliance of Black School Educators Academic & Cultural Excellence Award, 1995
Mayor's Educational Excellence Award, 1994, 1995 & 1996
Junior Achievement Parental Involvement Award, 1994
North Forest ISD Excellence Award, 1995
Center for Development & Study of Effective Pedagogy for African American Learners (CPAL), 1994, 1995 & 1996

"Our focus is life. Life and future. The majority of these children come out of underprivileged homes, and all they want is a chance to show that they excel. It's not where you came from—it's where you are heading."
—Volunteer

"We try to create rich experiences for every child. The fact that we do so much to give the children every opportunity is what makes us so successful. Ministers and leaders in the community got together to form the organization. All these things are really making the children feel good about themselves. They get to do some positive things and they know they have to keep up their work. So its an educational thing as well as a social thing."
—Fifth grade teacher

The level of student academic success at A.G.Hilliard Elementary School is vastly different from most of the stereotypes about urban minority schools in America. In one of the poorest sections of Houston, Texas, Hilliard is a learning community in which there is trust and respect for all, including students, teachers, and support personnel. Professional collaboration supports a powerful commitment to ensure the academic and personal success of every child.

When people come to work at Hilliard, they generally do not leave. Among teachers the average tenure is fourteen years. Part of the reason they stay is the high level of collaboration and mutual respect. The principal, Mr. Allen, explained that building trust took a considerable amount of time. He said, "We have a committed staff, or at least they have become that way. I believe it is because we made them responsible in the very beginning. We stuck by them. We started out showing them the way, then we stepped to the side and let them go on their way. We try to lead people. They know we are there. We have an open door policy. It took several years to build that up, that trust in each other. We went through the trial and error time.

Concepts such as mutual respect and shared responsibilities are much more than slogans at Hilliard. Mr. Allen gives tangible meaning to these concepts through his daily actions. One teacher explained, "We have a dynamic principal. He gives life to the meaning of instructional leader. He teaches classes and monitors the students all the time. He says that he never wants to forget what it's like to be a teacher. He does it all the time. There is no job too large or too small. Mr. Allen sets the tone for the school."

Part of Hilliard's success is due to its refusal to surrender to the obstacles posed by the poverty that surrounds the lives of many of the students. The school uses its resources to ensure that children have many of the important experiences that are available to more affluent children. As one teacher said, "We tell the students that money is not an excuse for them not to participate in any activity. We will do whatever is necessary to make them succeed. It's not just the administration, or just the teachers, it's everyone! Our rule is that money is not going to be an excuse to miss out on anything. It's that kind of thinking that makes us special."

Along with eliminating socioeconomic barriers, Hilliard focuses on the social and emotional development of its children. The principal and staff developed two programs: Young Men-Change in Action(YMCA) and Young Ladies of Elegance (YLE). These programs were designed (with the assistance of community leaders) to help students both socially and emotionally through the development of healthy self-esteem. Every child in the school participates in some activity or program.

The spirit of collaboration and respect at Hilliard extend to parents and the broader community. Teachers interact with parents in a manner that respects the difficulties parents endure. They acknowledge each parent's love and concern for his/her child, and support them in working with their children to improve academic achievement. For example, MARS (Make All Readers Successful) is a Hilliard reading program that survives through the participation and support of the community and the family members. The program symbolizes the school's ongoing effort to increase the involvement of families in every aspect of their child's education.

"The MARS program is a reading program that we use to increase community participation. Each teacher has flexibility to implement the program. Teachers read or guests come in such as a postman, a board member, a former principal, congressman..."

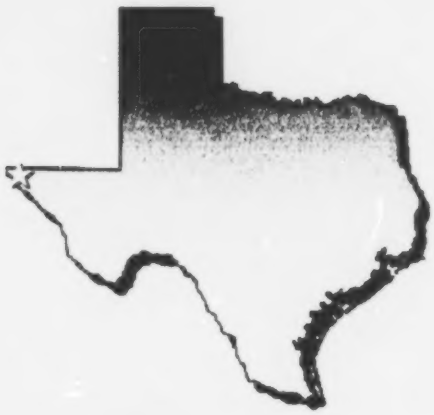
--Principal

Volunteers are a regular part of the landscape of A.G. Hilliard Elementary. In addition to the MARS program, there are also community volunteers (including police officers) who regularly participate in various school activities. The children have access to these role models on any given day of the week. At Hilliard, seemingly everyone has come together to create an environment that communicates three concepts to children: 1) the Hilliard community cares about you; 2) the Hilliard community has high expectations for your academic and personal success; and 3) the Hilliard community will provide whatever support is needed to help you live up to our high expectations.

"We read to the kids, play games, etc. It is not just academics, it is also sports, and social things. We do as much as possible to interact with them. We also do mock situations and role playing. We inform the kids of the laws, and how they can get into trouble, and how they can avoid trouble, and drugs, and we sit down and talk to them."

--Police volunteer

Hueco Elementary School, Socorro Independent School District, El Paso, Texas
Elfida Gutierrez, Principal / R. Jerry Barber, Superintendent



Demographics

Grade Span PreK-5
Number of Students Enrolled 601
Percent Attendance 95.2%
Ethnicity of Students
0.2% African-American
97% Hispanic
2.8 % White
Percent Receiving Free or Reduced Price Lunch 89%
Percent of Students with Emerging English Proficiency 71%

Other Awards/Recognition

Chapter I Honored School, 1993-94, 1994-95
El Paso del Norte Chapter, NAEYC
Exemplary Early Childhood Practices Award
Accepted by Johns Hopkins University to participate in Success for All Program

Results

Percent passing 1994-95 TAAS
87.2% Reading
80% Writing
81.3% Math

"We not only have to be governors of education, of academics, we have to be nurturers of human beings. That's a big responsibility."-- Principal Gutierrez

My school shines like a star because 1)it is recognized, 2) it's full of terrific kids, 3) it's special like me."
-- Child's essay

Surrounded by cotton fields, interspersed with trailer homes, small houses, a cattle stockyard, and family-run taquerias and groceries, and just a few miles from the Mexican border and Ciudad Juarez, Hueco Elementary is like a safe home, emanating brightness, freshness, and warmth. Inside the main foyer, a banner advertises, "This School is Full of Terrific Kids!" and framed poster-size enlargements of academic recognition certificates are prominently displayed on the wall. Children's art work, writings, and pictures adorn the hallways and give evidence of the thematic units around which teachers focus learning activities.

At Hueco, teachers do not approach the language background of their students as a limitation. Instead, they see and use the students' emerging bilingualism as an asset. Both Spanish and English are heard and seen in almost every school nook. About 70% of the teachers in the school are Hispanic, many from the Socorro Valley or nearby El Paso. Principal Gutierrez also grew up in a nearby community, with Spanish as her first language.

The positive role modeling that the staff provides for students is a key to the success of this school. Teachers assist children in developing both proficiency and pride in their bilingual skills and heritage. This Spanish-

positive environment also makes it easier for parents to become involved in the school, to participate in their children's education, and to grow themselves.

"Because we are a border city we have a lot of children who come to us in the third, fourth fifth grade—and have never been to school.... Once we get them into our little hands, they're just like regular kids. Just like anybody else. They just haven't been exposed. They just have been neglected in academics."

— Elfida Gutierrez

Mrs. Gutierrez maintains a "no excuses" policy towards the involvement of families. There is a constant outreach to parents through multiple avenues. One approach involves teachers sending letters home to parents on a regular basis. The letters emphasize what children are learning, activities in which students are engaged, and student accomplishments.

"We have a lot of books in Spanish. . . I invite parents to get a library card themselves. We are like a public library—and the only one around. . . I get parents to get involved by volunteering in the library. This is not a traditional quiet library."

—Librarian

The outreach to parents works. Sometimes it seems that there are more parents at the school than teachers. Parents assist in the office and classrooms. They sit in on story time in the library and check out books alongside students. Parents volunteer in the cafeteria, library, and on the playground. Many parents attend the free parent classes and services offered four days a week. Child care is offered before and after school hours to make parent participation easier. Some parents participate in a program where they are trained as community health educators on both physical and mental health issues. Other parents participate in computer literacy classes.

Whenever one visits Hueco, there is likely to be some recognition ceremony. At Hueco, learning is celebrated regularly. The librarian revitalized the Super Readers program that awards students for reading books and, when parents read to their younger children, awards both the parents and the students. Ceremonies also include recognition for NBA's, or those who have "Never Been Absent" and "Terrific Kids," a program supported by the local Kiwanis Club, where children are acknowledged for achievements outside of traditional academics. The awards recognize teachers and parents for success, and help the children gain confidence by learning to look one in the eye, shake hands, and receive the award, while proud parents and staff take pictures and applaud.

Even though Hueco Elementary has achieved beyond the levels attained by other Texas schools, there is an ongoing commitment to improving teaching and learning. The staff is always looking for better ways to provide instruction, to reach students, or to reach out to parents. Teachers from all grade levels and special programs, parents, support staff, and administrators share ideas openly and support each other in improving their school. Everyone has a role in improving the school. New ideas are heard and thoughtfully considered. Often the staff engages in research activities to determine which options hold promise for improving current levels of performance. Once all the data are considered, the bottom line for decision-making is, "What's best for the kids?" Hueco's veritable mantra.

R.L. Isaacs Elementary, Houston ISD, Houston, Texas
Leon Pettis, Principal / Dr. Rod Paige, Superintendent

Demographics

Grade Span: Prek-6
Number of Students Enrolled: 485
Percent Attendance: 96.8%
Ethnicity of Students:
- 64.9% African-American
- 34.8% Hispanic
- 0.2 % White

Percent Receiving Free or Reduced Price Lunch: 88.9%
Percent of Students with Emerging English Proficiency: 14.6%

Other Awards/Recognition

Title I Distinguished School, 1995-96

Results

Percent passing 1994-95 TAAS:
- 77.5% Reading
- 100% Writing
- 72.8% Math

When we have staff development meetings, we teach each other. We all bring in something. We brag and share, everybody just gets a kick out of it." —Teacher

"If I see that some of their children are doing better than one of mine with a certain skill, I'll send mine over, and they'll do the same for me. Sometimes getting out of your own environment and listening to someone else helps. Sharing makes all the difference."
—Fifth grade teacher

The challenges faced each day at Isaacs Elementary in Houston, Texas, are beyond what many schools face in a year. Poverty, homelessness, and hunger are as constant outside of the school as commitment, collaboration, and determination are constant within the school..

The staff at Isaacs does not believe in excuses. They believe that every child can succeed academically, regardless of the circumstances. However, they also recognize the need to go beyond traditional roles to ensure each child's success. Whenever teachers were asked about a difficulty faced by students, the response always included a discussion of ways that the school intervened in the problem. Often educators at Isaacs assume the role of advocate for students on issues that range far beyond academics and the typical concerns of schools. When families have unmet needs that have an adverse influence on the academic life of the student, the school works to address those needs or find others in the community who will do so. Teachers realize that their chances of facilitating learning are improved if students are adequately fed, clothed, and sheltered.

Teachers at Isaacs insist on having strong communication with the families of their students. Teachers do not wait passively for parents to

express interest or concern. They make phone calls and home visits to build a relationship with the families of their students. One third grade teacher explained, "I make home visits. Once I make a home visit, whatever problem I have ceases. Right there. The families don't always want you to come to their house, but I do. I'm welcome, of course, and I let them know we're in this together. I let them know this is our child. I have him for eight hours; you have him for 16. And we're going to work together so he can be the best child that he can be."

"At this school, the needs are immense. Everyday things create a challenge for us. I have had children that were homeless. We called around and found a shelter where they could go. The kids were spread out among friends. We called around and found all four kids and they were in the shelter that night with warm clothes, shoes, and food."

—Fourth grade teacher

Teamwork and collaboration are omnipresent at Isaacs. Collaboration is not something that happens once a month or once a week at a special meeting. Instead it is a daily part of life at Isaacs. The many collaborative efforts serve two important functions: First, the regular sharing of information about effective practices helps improve academic instruction. Secondly, the frequent collaborations create an atmosphere of support for teachers that increases their ability to cope with the difficult situations that arise from the special situations endured by many of the students.

Teachers told of changes in collaboration that had occurred at Isaacs over time. One teacher said, "There was no continuity when I first got here. Everybody was doing their own thing. Now it is a team thing. We try to help each other at all grade levels. Before, writing was considered a fourth grade problem. Now it is every grade's problem. We all take responsibility for it. We prepare the kids for the next grade, and it is not just the teachers who do it, it's the resource department, the librarian, and even the physical education teacher. We all work together. Last week we were doing measurement in centimeters. The physical education teacher heard that we were working on it, so they practiced measuring distance in centimeters after tossing objects. I went and thanked her because she did that without even telling me that she was going to reinforce our lesson. It was great! We all have the same goal; get the kids to learn."

Teachers at Isaacs have learned to be comfortable sharing with each other and learning from each other. Teachers feel comfortable watching each other teach, sharing ideas, and engaging in ongoing dialogue about the improvement of their classrooms. The strong support provided through the professional learning environment at Isaacs has resulted in low teacher turnover. At the same time, this learning environment has led to a focus on continuous improvement. Despite the many successes at Isaacs, teachers, the principal, and other school staff are constantly focused on making the school better, reaching more children, and improving the achievement of every child.

"Collaboration is the key here at Isaacs. We all collaborate with each other."

—Teacher

Lamar Elementary School, Corpus Christi ISD, Corpus Christi, Texas
Yvonne Duran, Principal / IDr. Abelardo Saavedra, Superintendent

Demographics

Grade Span: PreK-5
Number of Students Enrolled: 379
Percent Attendance: 98.8
Ethnicity of Students:
4% African-American
93.9% Hispanic
1.9 % White
0.3% Pacific Islander
Percent Receiving Free or Reduced Price Lunch: 95.8%
Percent of Students with Emerging English Proficiency: 10.8%

Other Awards/Recognition

1995-96 Title 1 Honored School Award
TEA Recognized School Status
1994-95 National Redbook Award for Parent Involvement
TEA Cycle II, Year 1 Texas Mentor School
1993-94 TEA Texas Successful Schools Award--High Performance
TEA Texas School of Excellence
1991-92 U.S. Department of Education *Blue Ribbon Schools Award*
TEA Texas Successful Schools Award-Outstanding Performance Effort

Results

Percent passing 1994-95 TAAS
85.7% Reading
87.5% Writing
72.8% Math

"Be the best that you can be." —Yvonne Duran, Principal

About the garden program with Texas A&M Extension Center, "To see the kids planting vegetables, harvesting and then having a salad, it is great." —Parent facilitator

Lamar Elementary School is focused on becoming a school that ensures high levels of academic achievement for each student. The poverty of inner-city Corpus Christi that surrounds the school presents challenges, but does not deter the conviction of educators to create a school that leads every child to academic success.

Evidence of challenging academic activity is displayed throughout the school. Science projects are outside many classes, student projects on Native Americans fill a large glass cabinet, and bulletin boards display student work and parent activities. The atmosphere at the school is very cheerful, but clearly "down to business".

The Content Enrichment Program exemplifies the commitment of educators to provide academic experiences that go beyond the ordinary. Extra time is set aside during the day for activities that go beyond usual exercises. Two fourth grade teachers explained, "We expand on a content area. We take, for example, a book and do studies on the book-research, writing skills. Kids don't realize they're doing research skills. It's just fun. In math content enrichment time is problem solving, not simply doing computation. They have to tear [a math problem] apart...and then solve it." Teachers say they find this time valuable because they can

address specific needs in-depth. The staff analyzes Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) scores to identify areas of need. Then they plan long-range goals for the year and plan content enrichment activities designed to meet those goals.

"We had a family during Christmas that...needed assistance...I took it upon myself to locate services for the family. I picked them up and took them to a local hotel for a weekend [so] they could get their services...It was a personal challenge for me."

--Parent facilitator

Although the focus on academic learning is strong, educators at Lamar recognize the importance of addressing other areas of student interest. Thus Success Clubs, activity groups sponsored by staff members, provide opportunities for students to develop and pursue other interests. The Clubs meet at regular intervals and complete several projects during the school year. Success Clubs include groups like Bear P.A.W.S. (Positive Attitudes, Winning Smiles), Advanced Choir, Honey Notes Choir, Honey Bear Drill Team, Care Bears Environmental Club, Lamar Geography Club, Lamar Reading Bears, Bear Facts Newspaper, Primary Odyssey of the Mind, Advanced Odyssey of the Mind, Safety Patrol and Student Council. Teachers value the clubs as an opportunity to foster both academic interest and personal skills in children. Success Clubs at Lamar have successfully built community, furthered inclusiveness, and supported students throughout their academic careers.

"You make Lamar shine"

--Principal, to students

The *Cheerleaders* program plays an important role in nurturing the belief at Lamar that all members of the school community are valuable to the educational process. Unlike Success Clubs, the Cheerleaders program has an explicit classroom focus. Cheerleaders are non-teacher members of the staff who "adopt" a class and serve as mentors and friends to the students in that class. One teacher said, "The secretary is my cheerleader. When students score 100 on exams I send them to her and she gives them candy. It motivates them."

"I see high school brothers and sisters coming back and saying 'I keep up with you!' A lot of it has to do with students knowing they have a lot to give back. You have to give back to the school. You can't take, take, take. The school extends to the community, and students are all a part of it, and they have to nurture it. We just have to make them aware of this."

--Teacher

The Cheerleaders Program is only one illustration of the way in which school staff collaborate with each other to support students. At Lamar, children learn that they are valued members of an important community. Students and their families learn that their growth and well-being is important to their principal, teachers, and an entire staff of caring adults.

"We're a community with many needs. But there is a strong sense of spirit."

--Principal

Los Fresnos Intermediate School, Los Fresnos Consolidated ISD, Los Fresnos, TX

Myrna Brogdon, Principal / Eliseo Ruiz, Superintendent

Demographics

Grade Span 5-6
Number of Students Enrolled 786
Percent Attendance 96.6%
Ethnicity of Students
0% African-American
88.3% Hispanic
11.6 % White
0.1% Native American
Percent Receiving Free or Reduced Price Lunch 78.4%
Percent of Students with Emerging English Proficiency 23.2%

Other Awards/Recognition

Texas Recognized School
Title I Commended School

Results

Percent passing 1994-95 TAAS
86.4% Reading
N/A Writing
78.2% Math

"I figure we all work very hard at success. We know our goals. We set our goal and we have something that we reach for." —Sixth grade language arts teacher.

"You can teach the math objectives and the reading objectives through drama." —Drama teacher

**At the beginning of the 1996-97 school year, changes in school district enrollment resulted in Los Fresnos Intermediate School becoming Resaca Middle School.*

The effort of the band director, and the support he receives from the school and the district, is a metaphor for the level of attention to and concern about student success that exemplified Los Fresnos Intermediate School. Almost 300 students at Los Fresnos Intermediate School participated in the school band each year. For the first concert of the year (usually just a few months after the students acquired their first musical instrument), the band director would create special musical scores. He would determine which notes students could play and tailor the scores accordingly. If a student could play only one note, the student had the chance to play it successfully in the concert.

Los Fresnos is a small community on the southern end of the US/Mexican border halfway between Harlingen and Brownsville. Los Fresnos Intermediate School was located in what was once (and is now again) a junior high school. Los Fresnos has a largely Hispanic population, including a substantial number of recent immigrants. Many of the students reside in border-style colonias: dispersed settlements without city

services, including many trailer homes with built-on additions. In rainy winters, flooded, unpaved roads are often impassible. Children sometimes catch rides on a neighbor's tractor or somehow get carried through the muck to get to the main road to get to school.

"The teachers share a common direction. They have a sense of purpose and they know how to get there. They know how it is to work as a team."

— Principal

In the front hallway, a large, tall trophy case displayed the school's recognition for outstanding TAAS (Texas Assessment of Academic Skills) scores, various accolades for schools throughout the district, and creative displays of children's work in history and math projects. The spacious library posted computer-generated student book reviews in the windows. The office secretaries greeted and fielded questions from students, teachers, and parents, switching fluidly from Spanish to English and back. The walls were decorated with bright, original artwork that was tied closely to curricular topics.

The growth in academic achievement at Los Fresnos Intermediate was likely influenced by a well-planned, well-supported professional development program carefully targeted to identified needs. The principal and teachers carefully considered annual student assessment data and identified areas where improvements were needed. Local experts in the most critical areas of need were contracted to work intensively with staff. The administrative staff of the school then spent considerable time visiting classrooms, observing teachers, providing reinforcement and assistance to help ensure that instructional approaches were implemented effectively.

Although there was a clear focus on academics, the arts were heavily emphasized at Los Fresnos. This was demonstrated not only by the prominence of the band, but also through the visual and dramatic arts. All students were encouraged to participate. Even the band practiced inclusion, encouraging all children, including low-performing and special education students, to participate any way they could.

In the Los Fresnos School District the partnership among educators seemed to lead naturally to a better partnership with parents and community members. Perhaps teachers who team teach, plan together, and go to one another for guidance and inspiration, are more likely to approach parents in the same spirit of cooperation. At Los Fresnos the parenting outreach program not only focused on parents as caretakers of their children, but as partners in the school community. They are not treated merely as parents in need of training for better parenting, but as active, concerned community members.

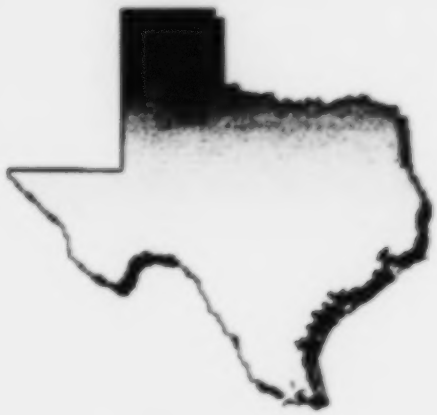
The spirit of cooperation and partnership led the staff to keep records of their carefully-developed and coordinated plans so that teachers receiving their students when Los Fresnos Intermediate School disbanded would have the benefit of the extensive work already done to maintain student achievement..

"You have to modify. We just modify every day...we do whatever we have to do to let them be part of the band. You know with your family, you wouldn't just throw them out the door. You keep them around even when they make a mistake. So that is our philosophy."

—Band teacher

Leo Marcell Elementary School Mission CISD, Mission, Texas

Mrs. Aurora Delgado, Principal / Mr. Lupe A. Gonzalez, Superintendent



Demographics

Grade Span: PreK-6
Number of Students Enrolled: 592
Percent Attendance: 97.3
Ethnicity of Students:
- 0% African-American
- 96.1% Hispanic
- 3.8% White

Percent Receiving Free or Reduced Price Lunch: 82.2%
Percent of Students with Emerging English Proficiency: 31.1%

Other Awards/Recognition

State Recognized Chapter I School, 1994
Chapter I Schoolwide National Recognition Program, 1995
National Diffusion Network Schoolwide Promising Practices Workshop Participants, 1995
Distinguished School, 1995-96
National Models for Success, Computer Curriculum Corporation, 1996
HOSTS National Quality Assurance Award in Language Arts Exemplary Rating, 1996
TEA Exemplary School, 1995-96

Results

Percent passing 1994-95 TAAS:
- 79.4% Reading
- 95.4% Writing
- 83% Math

"The key is the classroom teacher. Our teachers have high expectations of all students no matter what their language or socioeconomic level is." --Principal Delgado

"If you relate to their experience, you have sold them on the idea of learning." --Teacher

Marcell Elementary School is located in Mission, Texas, just a few miles from the Mexican border. At Marcell, each student is expected to achieve high levels of academic success. "High expectations" is more than a cliché here. Teachers expect the best from their students, but first, they expect the best from themselves.

The principal and teachers at Marcell believe that they can establish learning environments which ensure the success of each child. Thus, they are determined to meet this expectation of themselves. They use a wide variety of data to help them understand their students' current levels of performance and their progress, and the opportunities the staff can utilize for improvement. Teachers receive regular and prompt feedback that helps them make adjustments that result in more effective teaching.

With the focus on getting every child to succeed, a variety of academic support services are made available to students. For instance, each afternoon there is a learning center open to all students. The center provides academic assistance in all subject areas and space for doing homework. By having this type of support the child is more likely to have completed his or her homework each day.

"I think that a key, too, for successful teaching, is to keep in mind that you are going to get what you expect from them. If you have high expectations, that is what you are going to get."

--Teacher

At Marcell the staff has recognized that their high expectations for their students can be met only if they do an excellent job of enlisting families and community members in a team effort to ensure student success. Ms. Delgado, the principal of Marcell explained, " I think we have tried to open the doors to the parents. We can speak the same language. We value their opinions." Many parents and community members volunteer regularly through the Help One Student To Succeed Program (HOSTS). This program enlists parents and other volunteers in a tutoring relationship focused upon specific areas of need. Parents seem to like coming to Marcell. They comment that the school feels like a family. They recognize that they have an important place as part of that family.

" The parents are a valued part of the school. If you don't have the cooperation of the parents your job will be a lot harder."

--Principal

Mrs. Delgado has also recognized that in order to achieve high expectations it is important to celebrate the accomplishments along the way. At Marcell there is always a focus on accentuating the positive achievement of each student. The teachers are committed to working with every student to meet their academic goals. Once students achieve their goals, the faculty celebrates this success with recognition, respect, and support for the academic challenges which lie ahead. This support may be one of the reasons for the low teacher turnover rates at Marcell. Teachers are renewed by the large and small ways that the principal acknowledges their hard work and success. Even though the challenges are constant, Marcell is where they want to work. Marcell is where they know they will grow.

"I think this is the best place to be! We have a good boss. If the day doesn't go right, I am able to go in there and blow off steam and she just smiles at me. She is going to listen to us. She is always so calm. I have been in the business for 29 years, and I wouldn't trade her. She is a leader without ever telling us that she is the leader. She is one of us. She is always there for us, no matter what."

--Teacher

"I tell my students: you are my priority, learning is our priority. I don't care if there is a blizzard outside or a green eyed monster--learning is the most important thing."

--Teacher

Nixon-Smiley Middle School, Nixon-Smiley Consolidated ISD, Nixon, Texas
Gary Tausch, Principal / Richard A. Faulkner, Superintendent

Demographics

Grade Span 6-8
Number of Students Enrolled 231
Percent Attendance 95.3%
Ethnicity of Students
0.9% African-American
58.4% Hispanics
40.7% White
Percent Receiving Free or Reduced Price Lunch 69.7%
Percent of Students with Emerging English Proficiency 3.9%

Other Awards/Recognition

National Recognized Chapter I School
Texas Successful Schools Award (Significant Gain), 1994 & 1995

Results

Percent passing 1994-95 TAAS
82.3% Reading
73.7% Writing
73% Math

"I believe it was our strong vision that we could be successful.
--District Special Education Director (former principal)

"A lot of the kids say they don't have anyone to talk to. I make sure that I am available to the students. I have been opening the building earlier so that the students can come in and talk to the teachers or the administration staff."
--Principal

Nixon-Smiley Middle School is located in a rural farm community northeast of San Antonio, surrounded by flat, wide open fields sparsely populated with farm houses and grain bins. The school is located down a winding side road, near a poultry farm which employs many of its students' parents. The central building, with its distinctive sandstone walls, was originally established in 1941 as a high school. The campus now includes half-a-dozen other buildings.

At Nixon-Smiley one can note the ways the administration and staff work to make their time and resources more available to students. Each day the entire faculty conducts a special mid-morning, 25-minute "Tutorial Period." Students have the opportunity for independent study or for seeking extra help. A seventh-grade teacher says, "I try to make myself available to all students, try to make them feel they can talk to me, that they can ask me questions. I try to lower their defenses and make them see I'm someone they can talk to."

There is an on-going search for better approaches to addressing challenges and responding to the changing needs of the school and its community. The special education teacher shares: "We've just been really focused on improving our kids' skills...it's pretty continuous...They listen

[the administration] when we have a meeting or anything. Everybody feels free to speak and come up with ideas. Everybody feels that they're basically a part of the decision-making about what we're going to try to do. Ever since I've been here, it's been a priority to improve our lower level kids and bring them up." An eighth-grade teacher shares his thoughts on the process of facilitating student success: "High expectations are the most important thing... I think it is about having rapport with the students... motivating them to do their best... It is important to encourage them a lot. I give them lots of positive success to build on."

"A lot of the kids say they don't have anyone to talk to. I make sure that I am available to the students. I have been opening the building earlier so that the students can come in and talk to the teachers or the administration staff."

"We have teachers that have really high expectations of students... The attitudes of the students has changed. They know the teachers expect a lot of them... There's no reason to accept mediocrity when you can expect excellence."

— 6th Grade Teacher

One example of a successful new program at Nixon-Smiley Middle School is the Accelerated Reading Program (ARP), which has more than doubled the circulation of library books. The librarian explains briefly, "Our ARP has been a big success. Students can choose books to read, and then come in and take a test on the computer." Another accomplishment is the annual Book Fair. She shares, "We have a lot of low income students...who would not be able to buy the books...[last year] some kids saved their pennies, some kids went and did extra work for people to earn money...which I think is all positive." This year arrangements were made for students to earn gift certificates with ARP points and these were used to purchase 20% of the books sold during the Book Fair.

In the middle courtyard near the cafeteria stands a large satellite dish enclosed in a tall wire fence. Around the base small plants are beginning to grow. The 7th grade science teacher explains that these will eventually become vegetable patches, and a flower garden designed to attract humming birds and butterflies for observation.

Besides providing an innovative home for a science project, the new satellite serves as an important link to distance learning resources for this rural community. "It's really exciting; there's a lot to offer," says the school librarian, who is in charge of coordinating satellite education programs. The T-STAR network enables Nixon-Smiley students to take electronic field trips to such places as the Chicago Museum of Natural History, where they can call in and ask questions in a live-interactive format.

The school community has a goal of providing access to satellite programs for parents to continue their own learning process. The assistant principal, who also serves as the district's technology coordinator explains, "Any direction you drive in this community we're 60-75 miles from a university. I have parents coming to me... telling me that they just barely finished high school. They say, 'I'm making minimum wage ... and there's nothing I can do about it.' I look at those parents and think if we could provide satellite interactive programs for them they could ... [connect with colleges in our technology consortium]." She shares, "We not only want to get networked throughout the [school] district; but we also want to be able to provide community wide education... Because we are the community in this district, if anything's going to happen, we're going to lead it."

Lucille Pearson Elementary School, Mission CISD, Mission, Texas
Principals: Mona Parras, 1995-96; Selma P. Femat, 1996-97 / Mr. Lupe A. Gonzalez, Superintendent

Demographics

Grade Span PreK-6
Number of Students Enrolled 595
Percent Attendance 98.2%
Ethnicity of Students
99.5% Hispanic
0.5% White
Percent Receiving Free or Reduced Price Lunch 88.7%
Percent of Students with Emerging English Proficiency 32.6%

Other Awards/Recognition

State Distinguished School, 1995
National Promising Practices Program Nominee, 1995
National Recognized Chapter I School, 1995
State Recognized Chapter I School, 1993-95
Exceptional Migrant Program Award, 1995
National Models for Success, Computer Curriculum Corporation, 1996
TEA Recognized Award, 1992-93, 1993-94, 1994-95

Results

Percent passing 1994-95 TAAS
89.1% Reading
100% Writing
84% Math

You can tell from the looks on our faces here that we love our children. We run tight discipline but it's because we love them." —Mona Parras, Principal

"I like to consult teachers about all these questions because they're the ones who know about the students. I'm at their disposal." —Instructional Supervisor, about student assessment schedules

One cannot adequately describe Lucille Pearson Elementary School without using the word "passion." In the heart of the small city of Mission, less than two miles from the Rio Grande River and Mexico, and surrounded by all the trappings of poverty, Pearson exudes passion for excellence in every child.

Interactions between teachers, administrators and students throughout the day are very positive, conveying mutual care and respect. The sense of passion for excellence is instilled even in students. On display in fourth grade classroom windows are intricately designed TAAS (Texas Assessment of Academic Skills) encouragement cards. They are made by students not even scheduled to take the TAAS for years-kindergartners. The cards read, "Good luck on the TAAS fourth grade! You can do it! We're behind you 100%!"

This passion for excellence for every child permeates the decision-making process at all levels. The school is deciding whether to expand the two existing computer labs or to put more computers in individual classrooms. Reflecting on how that decision will be made, former Principal Mona Parras explains, "We would have to have data stating that one of the options is better than the other. . .The strengths are in your results.

When we make a change we have to see that it's going to improve student performance. What you have on the agenda, will it strengthen the instructional day? If the answer is 'no,' we put the idea in the trash can. We are student-focused. There will never be a compromise."

Such a spirit is also evident in the way grade level program changes are made. According to Ms. Parras, two years ago the fourth grade came to the administration and said they wanted to reorganize their instructional delivery. "We said 'no' at first because one teacher said 'no.'" Last year all the teachers approved. They decided to experiment with the arrangement under the condition that "we'll try it for one year. We'll look at the first six weeks and if the students are having problems, we won't sacrifice the kids for the teachers." So far two major indicators reveal success: That first year, "we were 100% writing, 86% and 87% on TAAS."

"I've learned how to teach here. I was trained and taught."

–Teacher, about staff development

This year Pearson staff made another major decision according to their passion for excellence. A "helping teacher" was hired in January due to an unexpected situation. Explains one third grade teacher, "Several staff members felt help was needed for a group of students in two different third grade rooms. These students were still reading on a first grade level." So they asked, "'How can we get these kids up?' We talked to our principal. We said, 'You need to look at this situation.'" The school had funding available to hire another teacher. But there was the concern about moving kids to a new teacher mid-year. Also, "we didn't want to pull out the kids for 'special' help and label them." So they decided that the helping teacher would work with the four kids in one class and the five in another, moving between the two rooms. After a few months, teachers report the students' motivation and self esteem have improved. "To see them reading and doing math is a success. Their TAAS pre-assessments have gone up." Howeve,r if after a full year this arrangement does not meet expectations, "we'll have to move her [the helping teacher]. The decision will be made by all involved," says Ms. Parras. "We won't make decisions unless our teachers feel ownership." But in the end the decision has to reflect a commitment to what's best for the students, no excuses: "We won't leave our kids behind."

"All kids have to be trilingual–English, Spanish and computer literate. And we are meeting that challenge.' –Teacher

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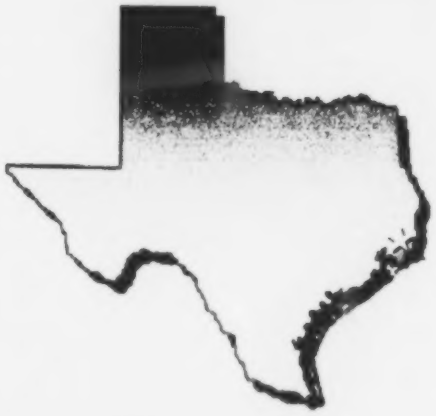
When asked about specific strategies for educating the large migrant student population at Pearson, Ms. Parras replies, "We don't see them as a migrant student. They are Pearson students." Migrant students are held to the same standards as students who attend all year.

"When the families come in (from being away for some months) we make a big to-do about it, saying we missed them." Many of the students are enrolling in the after-school tutoring program to help them catch up.

Pearson staff also collaborates with district personnel to ensure quality educational programs for migrant students. Says the Instructional Supervisor, "There's a Project Smart satellite hook-up nation-wide. Our district Migrant Coordinator makes sure that the students have access to the facilities up there [states they migrate to]. She's great for us–she gets what she can for the kids." Behind these and all program strategies at Pearson is the shared belief that "all children can learn." One staff member explained how the passion for excellence is demonstrated in daily decisions made according to the maxim, "if this were my child..."

Pietzsch Elementary School, Beaumont ISD, Beaumont, Texas
Shirley Bonton, Principal / Dr. Carrol Thomas, Superintendent



Demographics

Grade Span K-3
Number of Students Enrolled 570
Percent Attendance 95.1
Ethnicity of Students
78.2% African-American
8.2% Hispanic
9.8 % White
3.7% Pacific Islander
Percent Receiving Free or Reduced Price Lunch 87.8%
Percent of Students with Emerging English Proficiency 8.4%

Other Awards/Recognition

Texas Exemplary SChool, 1995
Texas Four Star School
Texas Recognized School, 1996
Title I Commended School
Texas Southern University CPAL Partner
Texas Successful Schools Award, 1995
Beaumont ISD Student Achievement Award
Triangle Interfaith Alliance School

Results

Percent passing 1994-95 TAAS
94.9% Reading
N/A Writing
93.9% Math

"There is not a child on this campus who cannot learn. It may take some of them longer, & we may have to find something a little different, but they will learn"
– Curriculum Coordinator

"We had never been given opportunities to get together before to even try. We had faculty meetings, we knew what the problems were, but we never did get together. We were given time to do that on inservice days instead of going to other inservices, that is what we had to do."
–Second grade teacher

Pietzsch Elementary School is located in the small southeast Texas city of Beaumont. The school lies along a busy street in the midst of a low-income community. The main building of the school is brick, built in 1906, and designated a historical landmark. Just inside the door is a bulletin board decorated in red, white, and blue bearing 5x7 photographs of every staff member in the school. Although the building is very old and in need of renovations, it shows the efforts of its inhabitants to make the building a warm, nurturing environment. The walls are carpeted in primary colors, and each teacher has added their own unique touch to the wall outside their door.

Through the unique combination of a challenging curriculum specifically selected for their students and warm "Pietzsch fuzzies" given to acknowledge and reward, the staff at Pietzsch Elementary School has conveyed to their "families" of students and parents their high expectations for academic achievement and courteous, responsible behavior.

Because the teachers know their children's strengths and needs so well, it only took a few weeks for them to know that the district's newly-adopted reading curriculum was not sufficient to bring their students to

the high academic goals they had set. The administrators trusted the judgment of the teachers and supported them in finding the right curriculum. The curriculum coordinator said, "Our teachers were really excited about it [the district-adopted program]...It is a beautiful program. But we have special needs with our children and the first grade teachers picked up on that right away. They started saying, 'We need a phonics program.' Mrs. Bonton and I started looking...We were looking at a lot of things, but this is the one that our teachers could commit to. We started the first year with reading in first grade. Last year we added the language in kindergarten and reading in second and third grades."

The discipline and behavior management plan that includes "Pietzsch fuzzies" is well developed and clearly implemented in every classroom. It provides continuity among and between the grade levels. To devise such a creative plan, the teachers reported simply that they were given the opportunity, and time, to plan together. Teachers brought the same creativity to committees that dealt with a myriad of other problems that had kept the school from achieving their goals.

"Challenges are part of our every day. It is a way of life for us to come in and intervene. We try not to go to outside agencies, but we try to create a better quality of life for them at home. The Pietzsch home, that is. That is why the family-type emphasis here is important. We try to look out for our family members so they can all do well. That is why the family is important. We feel a sense of ownership."

--Principal

Both the verbal and nonverbal language used throughout the day reveals that Pietzsch Elementary is a large family that has several dozen small families within it. On the walls outside some of the classrooms, the teachers have chosen to identify their room as the home of the "[teacher's name] family." Frequent physical contact such as hugs and soft eye contact are also indicators of the family-like environment. As students move through the halls, they hug the teachers and the principal. As the principal supervises the exchanges between classrooms, she addresses the children as her "little friends." Creating a family environment is not only an overt message in the school, but also a subtle style of communication between the members of the family. The family communication style appears to be the foundation for coping with the many struggles that the children of Pietzsch face every day. The staff utilizes this family style of communication in helping every child deal with both academic and nonacademic challenges.

"Actually, we are doing very well where we are. I know it is something we need, but it will come to us when it is supposed to. We just need to continue to focus on our kids. They can handle a lot."

--Principal

A major obstacle that the entire Pietzsch family deals with is inadequate facilities. There is peeling paint, buckets catch rainwater from roof leaks, and restrooms are located far from many classrooms. The teachers must take breaks during the day to give the children access to the restroom facilities. Despite these problems, the teachers did not complain. In fact, they minimize the importance of this problem and redirect their energy to the academic success of the children and warm "Pietzsch fuzzies" to celebrate.

Sagamore Hill Elementary School, Fort Worth ISD, Forth Worth, Texas
Sherry Breed, Principal / Dr. Thomas S. Toco, Superintendent

Demographics

Grade Span PreK-5
Number of Students Enrolled 723
Percent Attendance 94.5%
Ethnicity of Students
- 37.5% African-American
- 46.9% Hispanic
- 13.7% White
- 0.1% Native American
- 1.8% Pacific Islander

Percent Receiving Free or Reduced Price Lunch 85.3%
Percent of Students with Emerging English Proficiency 33.7%

Other Awards/Recognition

TEA Recognized School, 1994
Title I Successful School, 1994-95
Title I Successful School, 1995-96

Results

Percent passing 1994-95 TAAS
- 80.7% Reading
- 91.8% Writing
- 82.5% Math

"We all get involved. Get students involved and they're going to do well on any test!" —Teacher

"There's nothing we can't do!" —Parent volunteer

Just off a busy inner-city freeway, Sagamore Hill Elementary is located in a residential neighborhood dominated by small homes and apartments. The school is one of the centerpieces of the community; the focal point of local pride and effort. This is evidenced each morning as a stream of students sporting bright purple jackets with the school name embroidered on the back converge upon the school. The jackets were donated to all students and staff members by the nearby Sagamore Hill Baptist Church. While the school building is very old–it was built in 1902–inside it is extremely clean and neat. Hanging from the walls in the main hall are signs proclaiming "Congratulations Teachers and Students for Excellent TAAS Scores!", referring to the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills examinations, and "5th Grade Champion Teams" posters, as well as a huge sign that reads, "Sagamore Hill Baptist Church–We Appreciate Your Helping Hands!"

At the beginning of the school day, the school cafeteria is packed with children eating breakfast. Many are accompanied by their parents. After breakfast, students file into the auditorium to meet their teachers, while others enter the school on the arm of their parents who smile and say hello. Principal Sherry Breed is highly visible throughout the morning rit-

ual, greeting every student by name and with a smile as they pass by in the main hall.

"Last year she was asked to take another school and she said 'no.' She took a chance, to say no to her boss. She took it because we need her."

—Parent, about Ms. Breed

Sagamore Hill's academic success is due in large part to school community members' shared commitment to the success of each student. This commitment is modeled first by the principal and her assistant principal, who both spend a substantial portion of their days in classrooms making observations, talking with students, and providing assistance and support to teachers. The assistant principal explained, "We want to see what kind of instruction is going on. And the students know we're watching their behavior, too...I want to make sure students are learning. My first love is working with students and teachers."

The commitment to improved teaching and learning demonstrated by the school administrators is also evidenced in the staff as a whole. They embrace high standards and strive collaboratively to meet them. For example, the assistant principal explained how teachers recently approached her about the assessment of students who were learning English as a second language. Teachers wanted to be able to ensure that the academic needs of these students were being met. So the assistant principal explained, "Yesterday I went to a classroom and modeled how I would work with [a particular student with emerging English proficiency] and the class. I talked with [the teacher] about how to raise expectation levels. Teachers must have "the same standard for [students with emerging English proficiency] as others. I talked with the students about that too; about the richness of having two languages. The teacher was grateful for this"

Once a student steps out of their "confidence zone," their room, then it makes it difficult. So the teachers "go out of their way to give love to the kids in the hall...kids get hugs, 'I miss you,' 'I love you.'"

—Instructional Assistant, about addressing student difficulties

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Teachers hold themselves to high standards. A fifth grade teacher explains, "For a teacher to be successful, you're going to have to spend your free time...It's easy to take [the provided text book] and go through, but I use lots of outside resources...The downtown library, they know me well. I check books out by the ton. I need time to go out and do research. Under the circumstances, I do what I can do, after school and late." The teacher used the outside resources to make thematic units that are planned to fit not only the interests of the students but are aligned to the TAAS objectives and the overall goals of the school.

Parents at Sagamore Hill Elementary are included as valued members of the educational family. One active parent volunteer, the mother of a first grade student, explains that she gives so much of her time to the students because "I know they love me, and they know that I love them." Though she started coming once a month just to help her daughter's teacher, "I saw the need. Now I come once a week. If I make one student or one teacher smile, I'm good."

Scott Elementary School, Houston ISD, Houston, Texas

Dr. Artice D. Hedgemon, Principal / Dr. Rod Paige, Superintendent

Demographics

Grade Span: PreK-6
Number of Students Enrolled: 457
Percent Attendance: 97.3%
Ethnicity of Students:
- 46.9% African-American
- 52.7% Hispanic
- 0.4% White

Percent Receiving Free or Reduced Price Lunch: 93.6%
Percent of Students with Emerging English Proficiency: 32.2%

Other Awards/Recognition

National Association of Partners in Education
Exemplary Program Award
Title I Recognized School, 1994-95 & 1995-96

Results

Percent passing 1994-95 TAAS:
- 86.8% Reading
- 90% Writing
- 77% MATH

"She [principal] expects excellence. We have such a caring group of teachers. They believe the students can succeed." --Central office administrator

"It can be hard being a single parent and Scott has a really good counseling center. As a single parent I can't cope with something sometimes and they counsel my daughter to help her out. This is real special to me." --Parent

Nothing in the impoverished neighborhood surrounding Scott Elementary School offers a clue to the level of dedication and excellence found within the school. Scott is located in an older section of Houston's inner city area. Small, aging, wood-framed houses surround the school. Instead of sidewalks, ditches separate the narrow streets from the small front yards of homes. In the small park across the street, an after-school program is conducted. Students can go there to make art projects or get help with their homework. Some of the teachers at Scott work as tutors there after school or during the summer.

Whereas some schools have only mission statements, at Scott there is a true sense of mission that permeates every aspect of the school. This mission is clearly focused on creating a supportive learning environment that ensures every child the opportunity to attain the highest levels of academic achievement. The mission is apparent in decisions regarding the use of technology, federal resources, and professional development opportunities. The mission is equally visible in teacher decisions regarding the development of lessons. The staff uses student performance data to assist them in making high quality decisions that will improve their effectiveness as educators.

Scott staff believe their students will be successful regardless of any mitigating circumstances. If resources are lacking, they will find the resources. If bureaucracies inhibit their progress, they will find legitimate ways to satisfy requirements and still meet their goals. If outside help is needed, they will enlist community adopters, volunteers, or anyone else who is needed to assist them in accomplishing their mission. Scott staff have written and acquired grants, conducted garage sales, and collaborated with some of Houston's most prestigious businesses to get volunteers, technology, and other needed assistance. A major law firm in Houston commits thousands of hours of volunteer time each year in mentoring students, tutoring, and providing other forms of assistance. One of the law clerks was so moved by her volunteer experience that she entered an alternative certification program, obtained her teaching certificate, and is now a teacher at Scott.

"Families see this as a safe place where they can get help. Discipline is good because communication is good between teachers and parents. Teachers go to their students' houses.

— Parent

Although Scott staff are passionate about improving academic instruction, their focus also includes the arts, physical education, and other areas of endeavor important to the growth and development of children. The school has entered into partnerships with the Houston Grand Opera through the Students Through Arts Reaching Success (STARS) Program. This and other programs emphasize and instill pride in the multicultural heritage of the students.

Teachers spend considerable amounts of time planning and learning together. Time for planning and professional development was acquired by extending the instructional day by a few minutes four days a week and making Friday an early dismissal day for students. Teachers plan in grade level teams as well as vertical teams.

Most visible at Scott is the caring, nurturing environment established by the staff. Each child is considered important by teachers, administrators, and support staff. Programs like Target Hunger provide special assistance with physical needs, while the counselor and social worker facilitate groups that address social and emotional issues.

"No one tries to do it by themselves. We work together as a unit. If one teacher is good at teaching writing, then we'll work together and let her help all of us."

— Teacher

Just as students belong to the Scott family, so do the parents of Scott students. Parents are always at the school, volunteering, mentoring, taking classes, meeting with teachers, or participating in special programs. Family literacy is a joint program with Houston Community College where parents have the opportunity to take classes on how to speak, read, and write in English. There is no cost to the parents for the classes. The classes are held twice a week at Scott to enhance accessibility to parents. Scott provides incentives to the parents for taking the class and awards a certificate of participation upon its completion. One parent seemed to capture the spirit behind Scott's effort to involve parents: "At Scott, it's your school. We [parents] have power, the power to change the school. The parents have that power so that the kids can learn all they can."

Annie Sims Elementary School, Mount Pleasant ISD, Mount Pleasant, Texas

Judy T. Walker, Principal / Charles R. Wright, Superintendent

Demographics

Grade Span K-3
Number of Students Enrolled 449
Percent Attendance 96.9%
Ethnicity of Students
- 15.1% African-American
- 32.75% Hispanic
- 51.4% White
- 0.2% Native American
- 0.4% Pacific Islander

Percent Receiving Free or Reduced Price Lunch 58.6%
Percent of Students with Emerging English Proficiency 28.5%

Other Awards/Recognition

TEA Recognized School
Chapter I Commended School

Results

Percent passing 1994-95 TAAS
- 83.3% Reading
- N/A Writing
- 94.5% Math

"Most important I would say is that the faculty and staff work so well together."
—P.E. teacher

"We have a lot of teachers here who are very caring about children."
—School secretary

Annie Sims Elementary School is located in a small northeast Texas city about sixty miles from the Texas-Arkansas border. The school sits in a quiet residential neighborhood. The campus consists of three parallel classroom corridors with several surrounding buildings. All are connected by a network of open, sunlit walkways with names such as 'Friendly Street', 'Alphabet Avenue', and 'Reading Rainbow Row.' The school secretary explains, "We are really a city within ourselves, with highways and addresses." Near the school's entrance a small wooden shed houses the post office where students send mail to their pen pals. The window of the main office prominently displays student writings, spelling tests marked '100%', and colorful art work. The school secretary, who has been here for 14 years, smiles and says, "It's a bit of a status symbol to get to put your work on the front window." The wall inside the office has several awards and certificates, along with a large portrait of Annie Sims. "Annie Sims taught in our district for most of her life. This school was named in her honor."

Visitors to Sims Elementary notice the warm and friendly atmosphere

which pervades the campus. The staff seem to care deeply about the well-being of all their students. Overall, the children here seem happy and content. A kindergarten teacher says, "I'm gonna brag. One thing that almost everyone comments on...how warm our campus is and how everyone gets along. I would think that has to carry over to the kids. I've heard more than once how friendly the children are, how they come up to you, how much the children hug...As a campus I think we do have very loving kids."

"We now have site-based (teams) and we make our own decisions as far as what's best for Sims."

--Kindergarten teacher

One example which reflects the special care staff take to make all students feel comfortable is found within the content mastery lab. The lab was established as a resource area to provide students with enrichment and extra help. An aide explains, "When we first started we wanted to make it a place that was exciting for everybody. So they wouldn't see kids going in and say, 'Oh, that's the dummy.' We had a contest to name it, the whole school voted. 'Sims Cub Den' is the name they chose because our district mascot is a tiger. Now they don't say 'You're special education; you have to go out there.' When they walk in the door they're not labeled." Now all Sims students are welcomed by large paw prints painted on the passageway outside. All students now go to the Cub Den for enrichment activities, as well as special program assistance. Thus, there is no longer a stigma attached to participation.

On the way to the Cub Den or anywhere else on campus, students might note that teachers are on the lookout. Students run the risk of getting their names put in a jar to select those who will receive the weekly "Caught Being Good" recognition. This positive approach to discipline is another way in which the school focuses on the positive and endeavors to make all students feel comfortable.

"Cub Den is so neat. It used to be like a pull out program. Now, you send kids there, there's no stigma attached...all the kids love to go out there."

--First grade teacher

The staff at Sims has established very strong lines of communication and support within and among grade levels. Grade level teams coordinate their work around common themes. There is a schoolwide effort to collaborate and plan ways for all their students to receive the best they have to offer. One third grade teacher says, "Oh, we talk to each other all the time! We have a school-as-a-whole meeting, get together and discuss what's going on. In the teachers lounge we have themes [that describe] what each grade level is doing."

Sims teachers are proud of their accomplishments as a team, and openly praise one another. A first grade teacher says, "I think every teacher here really cares about the kids. I really haven't met anyone who was negative. We get frustrated, discouraged and tired; but everybody here just gets along well. We don't have somebody trying to steal all the glory... Everybody's really open to sharing."

Over the past three years, the Sims staff has had the challenge of being without a principal twice. They started this school year on their own. One first grade teacher notes, "We have practice governing ourselves." A kindergarten teacher commented, "... our campus looks out for each other." A third grade teacher suggested, "Perhaps it's perseverance. We come in and take care of business. Don't get me wrong, we need a principal, there are a lot of things that we can't do. But we're doing fine."

Springlake Junior High School, Springlake-Earth ISD, Earth, Texas
Bill Verden, Principal / Robert Conkin, Superintendent

Demographics

Grade Span 6-8
Number of Students Enrolled 154
Percent Attendance 97%
Ethnicity of Students
- 3.9% African-American
- 59.1% Hispanic
- 37% White

Percent Receiving Free or Reduced Price Lunch 59.7%
Percent of Students with Emerging English Proficiency 5.2%

Results

Percent passing 1994-95 TAAS
- 97% Reading
- 93.5% Writing
- 92.1% Math

"Our teachers care so much, because a lot of them have lived here a long time. A lot of them went through this school." —Parent

"I see that they push them to keep up with the state standards, to keep it moving. I think that is the important thing. If they didn't get it right the first time , then they teach again, then move on." —Parent

The Springlake schools are all located together on a paved road, about 1/4 mile off the main road between Springlake and Earth. Surrounding countryside consists of large, unfenced fields, brown and dry, with a few farm homes and their outbuildings nearby. The junior high is the oldest building of the three. A cafeteria is located in a separate newer building, and serves students at all three schools. The junior high building is square, with the principals office and the school office located in the center, surrounded by a hall with classrooms arranged on the outside perimeter. All floors are gleaming polished hardwood. Students, staff and parents intermingle in the halls with an easy camaraderie that shows their sense of belonging to the community.

There is no distinction between parents and school staff in the way they describe their school; they all use the words "we" and "our", conveying their sense of belonging and ownership. Most of the teaching and support staff are long-time residents of the community, and parents, teachers and students know the school as a social gathering place as well as one devoted to education.

As members of the community, everyone accepts responsibility for the

achievement of all students. The principal told about a teacher who had a student who was not reaching the standards she and his parents expected, "He began to coast. She has kept him after class. We have an 8 to 8:30 tutorial in the morning. She has had him in that, and then in the afternoon from 3:45 to 4:30. Now this has been a collaborative effort between the mother and the teacher."

"This is where I grew up. I was born and raised here. I went to school here and this is where my kids go."

—Teacher

This community has high expectations for student achievement, regardless of what may have occurred in the past, or what adjustments need to be made in instruction in order to reach goals. One of the teachers told about the achievement of one of her students: "I had a little girl last year who was a special education student. She was never mainstreamed as an elementary child. When they came over from fifth grade to junior high, she was mainstreamed in my class. From past teachers, she just didn't read, she didn't know the basics. You cannot believe how that girl came along. Of course, I would modify her tests, give them orally, that type of thing. But by the end of the year I was not modifying her tests. She was making high grades, higher than the rest of the class. I don't know if she had ever been given the opportunity to be in a regular class. At first it was hard with her because she was not organized and it would take her 20 minutes to get her pencil and paper. But by the end of the year, I was just amazed. In fact she tried out for University Scholastic League (UIL), this year; UIL poetry."

As community members, the teachers support each other and the parents in decisions that are made about what is best for the students. A parent said, "In my own personal experience, we have one child that was borderline to qualify to go into the special education program, and we chose not to, simply because we felt that he could do the work when he wanted to. We had no resistance to that, so I really feel like they expect the kids to do their very best." She went on to tell of the efforts the family expended at home, and the extra help provided to her son at school so that he was catching up and meeting the same expectations held for all students.

"I go to all their ball games, their track meets, even though track is my least favorite sport. I still go, even though I don't want to, even though I don't feel like it. The kids ask me, 'Are you coming?'"

—Teacher

The school provides most of the social activity in the community. A parent said, "There is just about everything to do that a small town can offer. Sometimes I think we are running in circles, but if it wasn't for band or sports, then there would be a lot of kids with too much free time." She went on to say, "There are a lot of expectations about how we want our kids to behave and how we want our school conducted. So many people here were born and raised here and are putting their kids right back through the system. We expect a lot. I think there is a lot of public input. On the other hand, there is a lot of public pride when our school excels in whatever they do." The words of this parent describe the sense of community; "our kids, our school."

Sunrise Elementary School, Amarillo ISD, Amarillo, Texas
Richard Ross, Principal / Bob Moore, Superintendent

Demographics

Grade Span PreK-5
Number of Students Enrolled 475
Percent Attendance 95.3%
Ethnicity of Students
- 7.7% African-American
- 54.1% Hispanics
- 36.2% White
- 1.8% Native American
- 0.2% Pacific Islander

Percent Receiving Free or Reduced Price Lunch 80.5%
Percent of Students with Emerging English Proficiency 12.4%

Other Awards/Recognition

National Recognized Chapter 1 School
Title I Recognized School, 1992-93 & 1993-94
Title I Distinguished School, 1994-95
Texas Recognized School, 1995-96

Results

Percent passing 1994-95 TAAS
- 82.4% Reading
- 97.3% Writing
- 77.2% Math

"I know where I belong and it is here. I don't have the grass is greener complex. I've seen the other side, and I know it is not for me." -- Fourth Grade Teacher

At Sunrise the whole staff is focused on success. "Everybody just kind of got together and said, 'What are we going to do? How are we going to make this work?' And nobody took anything personally. We knew as a staff that we had to do something and it had to be everybody, it couldn't just be one person here and there."
--Third Grade Teacher

Sunrise Elementary School is in Amarillo, a city in the Texas Panhandle where the flat landscape provides a panoramic view of the open sky. The nation's second largest canyon is about thirty minutes away. At the entrance to the campus there are bright orange benches and a sign for 'Sunrise Tigers,' the school's mascot. The front lobby is an open area with student work and inspirational posters on the walls. Outside each classroom there are signs bearing class names such as: 'Tiger Court', 'Zebra Street', and 'Pooh Lane.' Posted near the cafeteria are McReader certificates from the McDonalds' adopt-a-school partnership, which highlight student reading accomplishments. The hallways are filled with displays of student writing samples and art work.

This year Sunrise Elementary has changed to a year-round calendar. The assistant principal describes how the decision to change was a student-centered process which extended to the whole school community. "We looked at it from a student perspective...they just didn't need the large span in the summer between their learning sessions." The result was nearly total consensus for year-round schooling. She explains, "The whole school was involved in the process of deciding. We all had to buy in to it. We talked with the parents. Of course, first you take a survey of

the teachers to see how many are willing to do a year-round calendar, whether they were in favor or not. We sent out surveys to the parents to see how they were feeling... in time we sent out another survey having them vote, and among those ballots returned over 80% were in favor of the initiative."

Another example of how Sunrise Elementary successfully engages it's community is seen in the HOSTS lab (Helping One Student To Succeed) where nearly 150 mentors volunteer time each week to work one-on-one with first - third graders who need support with their reading. They comprise a diverse group including business persons, parents and grandparents, university students as well as many of the school's staff.

"Sometimes that's all some of our children need, time alone with an adult who will listen to them."

– Assistant Principal

The staff at Sunrise emphasize the importance of providing support in challenging situations both for their students and themselves. One fourth grade teacher, who has been teaching for twelve years, recounts a recent success story about a previous student who seemed emotionally disturbed and had developed a reputation as a non-conformist; but who also was tested as "Gifted and Talented." Her strategy was to form a team with the counselor and principal to focus on the child and his needs. Although successful, it wasn't easy. She shares, "[The principal] worked with him; I worked with him. I thought one of us would die... I didn't give up. I worked with him to reach his potential ... But I had to see him as a complete individual ... This year the nurse asked him, 'I don't see you in the office this year, what happened?' [He named me]."

I would say the goal is for the students to learn more about themselves, their interests, abilities and to get them excited."

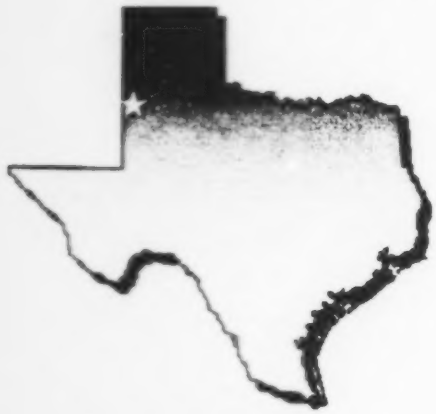
–Counselor

One third grade teacher believes the success Sunrise has experienced is a result of staff collaboration. She explains how the staff works together to communicate expectations clearly. "Before school started the second grade teachers came to talk with us. We've done that through the whole school... Our correlation between grades is pretty good. I can talk to any of the second grade teachers. They're not going to take it personally. I don't take it personally when a fourth grade teacher comes to me and says, 'What did you do?!'"

Sunrise works toward finding new and improved learning experiences for their staff and students. This includes developing a network of classroom computers. One teacher recalls, "When I first started... we had no computer lab; the library was never open–it was empty. We had two or three teacher lounges and stockrooms because of the extra room...[The principal] came in and started rolling on getting the library open. He's been an expert at finding things, bringing them to us, and asking, 'What do you think? Do you think it will work?'...This school is now packed; we are at capacity." The staff at Sunrise is presently researching different options for their new computer programs. A third grade teacher explains, "I think that it's going to take awhile; it's going to take a year of getting our feet wet to see whether we're going to go with it." This attitude of experimentation to find the best formula for success is one of the many things that makes Sunrise Elementary special.

Three Way School, Three Way ISD, Maple, Texas

Principals: Don Paris, 1995-96; Danny Jones, 1996-97 / Bill Hood, Superintendent 1995-96



Demographics

Grade Span K-12
Number of Students Enrolled 127 (94-95 PEIMS) 115 at time of visit
Percent Attendance 97.4%
Ethnicity of Students
54.3% Hispanic
45.7 % White
Percent Receiving Free or Reduced Price Lunch 70.9%
Percent of Students with Emerging English Proficiency 2.4%

Results

Percent passing 1994-95 TAAS
83% Reading
93.8% Writing
83% Math

Parents in this school are here Johnny-on-the-spot if their kids make a low B or a high C. And that makes a big difference." –Teacher

"Our kids are supported by their parents. We have a lot of parental buy-in for the activities. For instance, our pastor over here at the First Baptist Church, they've not had children in this district for years and years, but he goes to all of the home games and some of the out-of-town games." –Principal

The small town of Maple is on the western edge of the Texas panhandle. The town consists of the cotton gin and a few fairly new large brick homes. All businesses on the main street and many older homes have been boarded up. A huge pile of cotton seed almost dwarfs the gin, and the telephone and power lines are covered with cotton lint. The school, located about four miles from Maple, is a one-story building with an unpaved parking lot in front. Nearby is a small, well-maintained church, and a few small houses. At the back of the school, six inch deep sand has drifted under the playground equipment, the result of a weekend sand storm. Inside, the broad halls display colorful posters and some children's work. Large blue paper raindrops hang from the ceiling in the elementary end of the hall, a visible symbol of what the surrounding land needs so desperately.

The district superintendent has recently retired after a long tenure, and the school principal was promoted to fill this vacancy. Mr. Paris is a retired principal who agreed to come in and finish out the school year until a new principal can be hired.

"We were at Loop, Texas, 90 miles away, three or four of us, until late hours. We will be there tomorrow."

--Principal

This small school, and the activities of its 115 students, is the gathering point for the people who live in the more than 300 square-mile district. Parents are the constant that hold this school together. They know that if their children are to be successful, they must acquire the education and skills to compete in a world that is very different from this one. Consequently, the families of the students are very active and involved in everything that occurs at the school. They hold high expectations of their children, the teachers, and school administrators. One teacher related, "A child had a B in Texas History, and that mama was up here. [She wanted to know] 'What does my child need to do to get an A?' I said, 'Study for the tests.' I want you to know that the student came in on Wednesday and said, 'The test is Friday and my mom is already making me study!'".

The isolation of the school and the harsh weather conditions contribute to frequent turnover in teachers. The principal said, "Our support staff seems to be stable, but the professional staff seem to leave with some regularity."

To compensate for the high turnover in teaching staff, for reasons over which they have little control, the parents and the professional and support staff who call Maple home make the new teachers part of the community of the school in many ways; they keep class size very small to entice teachers; they provide friendly support and mentoring; and the provide generous staff development. The first grade teacher said, "We have a wonderful situation because we have so few kids. It is almost a lure for us because it is so personal and it is really a nice atmosphere." Administrators make sure that teachers understand the expectations of the community and have the training they need to support high student achievement. One of the teachers said, "The principal was just adamant about all first-year teachers going to workshops. They gave us all kinds of information about what we needed to do as far as the reading scores and writing scores and what (we) had to do as far as mechanics...I thought, 'We can do that.' I felt like every child could do what they needed to do."

"See, these kids don't think they can do these things. And they got mad at me and they griped and they complained. But in my classroom I told them that since I had gone to several TAAS workshops, I wasn't settling for 70%, because 70% is just getting by." "I said, 'Let's set our goal for 80%.' Everybody agreed with that, said that was what they wanted to shoot for. And that is what we did with that group. That was the seventh grade group."

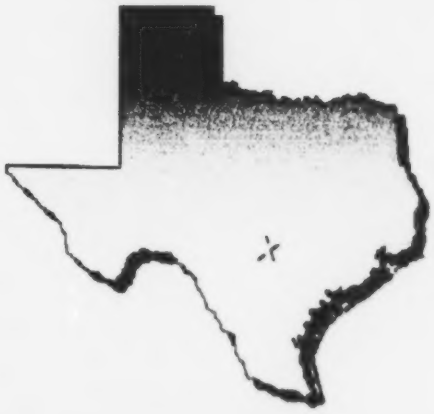
--Teacher

The school staff is utilizing the technology they have and exploring new ways of utilizing technology to bring more high-level instruction into the school. The technology teacher explaining plans to connect to the internet, said, "We will have classes wherever we can get them, with specialized instructors." "If we were more connected we would be at parity with larger schools."

Activities that other schools may take for granted require a great deal of time and energy for staff at Three Way. Participation in University Interscholastic League (UIL) activities requires not only extensive planning, but long rides on busses.

Parents are constantly visible at the school, serving as substitute teachers at a moment's notice, attending extra-curricular activities, or visiting. Their determination is the mainstay that makes Three Way School successful.

West Avenue Elementary School, North East ISD, San Antonio, Texas
Jacqueline Lee, Principal / Dr. Richard A. Middleton, Superintendent



Demographics

Grade Span K-5
Number of Students Enrolled 533
Percent Attendance 96.2%
Ethnicity of Students
1.3% African-American
73.4% Hispanic
24.8% White
Percent Receiving Free or Reduced Price Lunch 79.7%
Percent of Students with Emerging English Proficiency 2.4%

Other Awards/Recognition

Texas Successful Schools Performance Gain Award, 1992
TEA Recognized School, 1993-94 & 1995-96
Chapter I Recognized School, 1993-94 & 1995-96
National Chapter I Recognized School, 1995

Results

Percent passing 1994-95 TAAS
87.4% Reading
82.8% Writing
74.6% Math

"It is patience, persistence, and praise. And school is supposed to be the three R's." —Grandmother

"We do a lot of community service here—it is a constant reminder to kids that you are part of something."
—Fifth grade teacher

West Avenue Elementary is an oasis of calm on a busy street in urban San Antonio. This is a safe place for children to learn and grow. As well, it is a haven for parents. Ultimately, it is also a safe place for the educators who work there. West Avenue is a place for them to grow and learn as professionals who want to help children achieve high levels of academic success.

Even the walls attest to the positive spirit at West Avenue. The entryway bursts with artwork, the product of parent and student collaboration. Elsewhere throughout the school, bulletin boards are used to both celebrate the work of students and to make the school a more cheery place. There is a large and gaily decorated modern resource center replete with computers in the middle of one section of the school, open to the hallways and visible from the classroom windows. Several fathers of students planted decorative plants in the central atrium. These men donated their labor to enhance the school's environment, taking part in the ownership of the school. On one wall of the atrium is a Mexican-theme mural. The atrium is used by both staff and parents as a place for teaching, eating lunch, planning, and meeting

A strong concern for academic excellence is balanced by a concern for

the social and emotional needs of students and families. One of the ways West Avenue seeks to make learning more complete is by making the school a sort of community center. The school calendar is filled with "Family Fun Nights", student performances, spaghetti dinners, puppet shows, bingo, dances, mariachi, story telling and the like, in order to get parents involved in the school in a social way. In addition, teachers seek to "fill in" for life experiences that some children from limited economic environment would never have otherwise. "The families here don't have much available to them socially - but with things like family fun night, it makes sense. This might be all a family has to do things together. It's free, and you meet other community members."

"There is always something to draw you into the school."

--PTA Secretary

Principal Jacqueline Lee treats parents as "partners in the education of children". School staff are continuously looking for new ways to include parents. They have a family math program, and teachers regularly use notes and phone calls to encourage parent participation. Throughout the school, each child has a take home folder that is carried home, and that parents are expected to sign. Along with academic work, in the folder is a conduct sheet on which any adult at any time can note a child's good or bad behavior. Teachers see their school-wide discipline plan as successful, noticing measurable results throughout the school.

One celebrated aspect of the school is the feeling of personal and physical safety, as one might feel in a home. One parent said about West Avenue, "I feel like my child is safe in this environment. I don't worry. She loves to come to school every day." People also speak of how teachers take a personal interest in every student's well-being and success. One parent explains: "I think it is the attitude of the staff: the teachers are here because they want to be. They love what they do. They love the kids. They don't complain. They treat every child with the same attention, whether they are learning disabled like my child or not."

"The teachers get to know the entire school well"

--Parent

Teachers come together to plan, make decisions and voice their concerns for each student. In group interviews with grade level teams, teachers collectively discussed different challenges and successes, showing how they already knew one another's experiences with each student. One teacher explained that she feels no hesitation to go to another teacher or her administrators with any concern. Another says, "We have grown together. There is continuity between the grade levels, there are a lot of new ideas. The administrators haven't been very long out of the classroom. I guess you would say we are sort of like a family: we work together, support each other. There is respect."

The staff sees the principal as an advocate and support. One teacher explained, "I can go into Jackie's office and if I say, I need whipped cream because it will improve our TAAS scores, she'll do it. With Jackie, she knows we are professionals and she trusts our judgment. She gives us the leeway to be creative." Teachers, support staff, parents, and students seem convinced that they can be successful at West Avenue. As such, they refuse to allow any barrier to remain standing in their way.

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Wolffarth Elementary School, Lubbock ISD, Lubbock, Texas
Mr. Armando Garcia, Principal / Dr. Curtis Culwell, Superintendent

Demographics

Grade Span: K-6
Number of Students Enrolled: 360
Percent Attendance: 96.1%
Ethnicity of Students:
91.9% Hispanic
6.8% White
1.2% African American
Percent Receiving Free or Reduced Price Lunch: 91.7%
Percent of Students with Emerging English Proficiency: 16.1%

Other Awards/Recognition

TEA Recognized School 1993-94, 1994-95, 1995-96

Results

Percent passing 1994-95 TAAS:
91.3% Reading
87.8% Writing
90.8% Math

"The year I left to go back to school I ended up crying because I didn't know if I would be able to come back to the same school."
—First grade bilingual teacher

"So if you have a parent that...who is maybe skeptical about something you're doing...if you can get them on your side and get them to help you, they can become your biggest advocate."
—Teacher

Wolffarth Elementary School is located in the small West Texas City of Lubbock, where raising and processing cotton is still the major employer, followed closely by Texas Tech University and a growing medical center. The school is in a residential area of simple wood-frame homes approximately a mile from the university. It is a one-story beige brick-building that is well maintained and simple on the outside, but very alive on the inside. Near the front entrance are many pictures of students attached to certificates of excellence in citizenship, student council and safety patrol. One poster on the walls throughout the school says "I Can, You Can, We Can, Everybody Can". "Everybody can" sums up the shared leadership found at Wolffarth. The staff takes the lead in providing a strong instructional program, and the principal demonstrates the powerful results that can be obtained by supporting, facilitating, and when necessary, protecting the staff from influences that might distract them from their goal of high academic achievement for all students.

Several years ago, at the suggestion of teachers, the whole teaching staff began following their students from grade to grade. Although the original intent was to provide relief from the pressure of testing at fourth grade level, the results far exceeded that original expectation. The

principal explained, "When we had all the success that we did on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test, nobody was at a grade level where they had taught before. Everybody, with the exception of maybe one first grade teacher and a couple of kindergarten teachers was in a new position...I am going to say that the success was due to the experienced teachers who were dedicated enough to make that commitment and had a good knowledge of what the kids were capable of. This year we will probably let teachers pick the grade level where they want to stay for a while."

"If we are not successful, I know that it is not because of lack of effort, because it has been there. I think we are a very focused faculty, very goal oriented. The teachers want the kids to succeed."

-Principal

Staff members at Wolffarth are willing to take any measure to ensure students' success. A second grade teacher who has been teaching at Wolffarth for six years attributes the success to the staff and the students. "We have a very dedicated staff and we are all dedicated to one thing, and that is student learning. If we have to stay at school until 6:30, we do it; and if we have to get here early, we do it. If we all have to meet together, we do it. Just whatever it takes, and we have to be willing to do it. Many of us are here until 6 o'clock at night. We all love each other, work together and support each other and lean on each other. There are times we don't always agree with each other but there is a spirit of compromise."

The principal believes the role of the school is not just to meet the academic needs of the students but the emotional needs as well. He uses his relationship with the students and their families to support them in every way possible. "We're 93-94% Hispanic, poor, low neighborhood. That doesn't mean we are all poor, some parents are plumbers, bricklayers; have positions where they are doing well financially. Also in our neighborhood we have very poor dysfunctional families who have a difficult time in life. Some of these kids have little chance to succeed. We provide a haven. We feed, clothe, educate, guide them. We try to be loving, caring sharing individuals. I hope we have the rapport with kids so they feel like they are welcome at school even though everything else around them is falling apart. They are safe and protected in school...We have gangs also...We have a few kids who have either big brothers or cousins or dads who may be gang members. I have a good relationship with them. I treat them in a dignified manner and am open with them. Some of them I have known since they were in kindergarten. I think we have mutual respect."

"We provide that haven, we feed, clothe, educate, guide them. We try to be loving, caring, sharing individuals. I hope we have the rapport with kids so they feel like they are welcome at school even though everything else around them is falling apart. They are safe and protected in school. We try to provide that."

-Principal

At Wolffarth, the staff and students have taken to heart the expression "I can, you can, we can, everybody can," and live it in their daily actions.

El Magnet at Zavala Elementary School, Ector County ISD, Odessa, Texas

Marilee Holmes, Principal 1995-96 / Dr. Gene A. Buinger, Superintendent 1995-96

Demographics

Grade Span: K-6
Number of Students Enrolled: 654
Percent Attendance: 96.4%
Ethnicity of Students:
8% African-American
69.6% Hispanic
22.5% White
Percent Receiving Free or Reduced Price Lunch: 80.6%
Percent of Students with Emerging English Proficiency: 33.6%

Other Awards/Recognition

Model for Success Equity Award; Fourth Grade Writing, 1993-94
Model for Success for Minority Achievement; Fifth Grade African Americans & Sixth Grade Hispanics, 1993-94
TEA Title I Commended School, 1995-96

Results

Percent passing 1994-95 TAAS:
77% Reading
84.3% Writing
70.9% Math

With the limited amount of time you have with the kids, the time has to be special."
—Assistant superintendent and former principal

"For vertical planning, we had a chart on the wall and everyone brainstormed about what's important at each grade level, and the ones above and below looked at it to know what has been and what is coming."
—Sixth grade teachers

The rugged determination that built Odessa out of the dusty oil fields of West Texas is the same determination evidenced by educators at El Magnet at Zavala. The staff at El Magnet at Zavala do whatever it takes to ensure that students learn. El Magnet at Zavala Elementary School is located in a residential area away from the main streets in Odessa. The neighborhood surrounding the school consists of modest frame single family homes. The foyer of the school, and three halls leading off of it, are broad and expansive, just like West Texas. Clean floors, brightly colored bulletin boards, and hall walls covered with student artwork create a cheery atmosphere to support student learning.

The word most used by teachers and support personnel at Zavala is "focused". They use it over and over to describe the difference between the school as it now is, and the way it was in 1993 when Zavala was one of the lowest-performing schools in the district.

In a group interview of sixth grade teachers they said, "We have aligned the curriculum. This helps us focus on what to teach and gives us direction. We do vertical planning to determine what the grade level

below needs to do and what the next grade level expects."

Focus is greatly influenced at El Magnet at Zavala by ongoing, collaborative planning processes. Fourth grade teachers said, "Now we do group planning, not individual. Mrs. Hart required it. She set up a time for group planning. She came in and sat in and taught us how."

In their planning efforts, educators at El Magnet at Zavala make strong uses of student performance data. The school district has developed a formative assessment that allows teachers to assess the extent to which students are learning the objectives tested on the state's Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). A fifth grade teacher said, "The (formative) test we give helps us focus. Each TAAS objective is tested. It is on computer and it is sent downtown. They score it and send us graphs and tables so we know at the beginning of the year what objectives are coming and what we need to teach. It is given in first through sixth grade. It has held us all accountable, not just third grade up."

"We know how children learn. We know that it has to be physical, we know that they have to have more than just their ears tuned into it, we know that they have to do some other things before they are ready to do pencil and paper activities."

—Former principal

Most of the credit for the dramatic change at Zavala is given to the former principal, Mrs. Hart, who was recently promoted to a position in the district central office. Mrs. Hart candidly shared about finding a staff that was demoralized and divided, a staff that did not recognize their own abilities. She said, "Teachers thought they couldn't make a difference. They found out they could make a difference."

Some of the principals first actions focused on making the school building clean and attractive. Another important change involved restructuring the school day to minimize the extent to which students were pulled away from their regular classrooms. Mrs. Hart explained, "There was one very concerned teacher who said she never had her children with her. On Wednesdays, for instance, she had her entire class with her for 30 minutes a day. We redid the schedules so there would be more time on task for children." She provided leadership to the staff in adjusting the curriculum and clear direction in instruction.

Another significant change emphasized the importance of respecting the language and culture of all students. Mrs. Hart insisted that the school's Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) reflect the ethnicity of the parents and provide Spanish translation for all parent meetings. The bilingual education program was expanded so that students with emerging English proficiency were given a strong foundation in their native language, enabling them to make the transition to English literacy using skills developed in their native language.

Mrs. Hart's determination and focus did not wane in the face of difficult challenges. She garnered the support of the superintendent to expand the court-ordered magnet program from one that was a school-within-a-school program for magnet students only to an after-school program of enrichment and support for all students. To help El Magnet at Zavala attract and retain some of the area's best teachers, she worked with the Junior League and other groups to provide an on-site day care program for children of teachers.

Mrs. Holmes, the current principal, is striving to continue to build upon the strengths of the school realized by Mrs. Hart and the staff at Zavala. Staff members also expressed a strong commitment to maintaining and carrying forward the improvements that had been put in place. Although Mrs. Hart has moved to another position, the focus and determination to help every child succeed still remains.

Successful Texas Schoolwide Programs:

Voices of Practitioners and Parents

As we visited the successful schools identified for our study, we expected to see good things because the results, as measured by the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), were impressive. Still, we were overwhelmed by the excitement and passion that teachers, administrators, and support staff demonstrated for their work with students, and by the extraordinary love and caring exhibited by so many in their daily work with students and families. It was a love that went beyond sympathy and compassion: it was an active love, born from a desire to support, motivate, push, and elevate students to the highest standards of academic achievement.

Although we have written reports of our findings, we humbly acknowledge that our words do not adequately capture the power and the spirit of the schools we visited. Thus, we offer the voices of those who really know: the teachers, parents, administrators, and support staff of the schools we visited. We have extracted from our thousands of pages of field notes some of the excerpts of interviews. Additionally, parents and teachers in some of the schools wrote to us to tell more about their schools.

"My Son, His Teacher and I have been Successful as a Team."

"I am a parent of three students at Hilliard Elementary School in the North Forest School District. My children are in first, second, and fourth grades. This is the first time that my children have attended public school; and frankly, I was very apprehensive. To begin with, they were home-schooled for two years and then went to a very small religious school in another state. Further, I was new to this neighborhood and its socio-economic situation. Imagine my surprise when I found that Hilliard was a first-rate school that took pride in education. I found this to be true on many levels; however, one incident comes to mind.

My second grader advanced to the Apex (accelerated) class. I felt apprehensive, because after being tested at the University of Texas, they found that he has an encoding problem. He has no retrieval problems, but it was necessary for us to do lots of repetition to keep him on level. My concern was that he would not do well in Apex because he was a hesitant speaker, and not a very good reader. His teacher had confidence in his ability and asked that I give it a chance. My son loved his regular class teacher, and he had made friends in his original class. Also, this child does not make transitions very well. Nevertheless, we agreed to give it a try.

I could see his confidence going down after being in this class for one week. He had come from being on top in the regular class, to being at the bottom in terms of reading. His math was on level, and his ability to understand was there. But he was ashamed of reading out loud and he asked often to return to his old class. His teacher saw potential, and she was determined to make him see the same thing. I could only see the sadness that he expressed when he came home, so I told him to tell his teacher how he felt. When my son came home, he was very positive. He told me of the caring words his teacher said. He said she liked him and wanted him to be successful. Yet he still felt embarrassed when she called on him, or commented on his level of reading, his daydreaming, and his forgetfulness. I decided that she was making him feel worse. A month or so passed, and I decided to have a talk with her. Somewhat upset, I had concerns about him being pushed. I had worked myself up to be forceful and to state clearly that I did not want my son humiliated in class. I would even suggest that he go back to his old class where he

felt successful. The teacher gave up her lunch hour to talk with me because it was convenient for me.

When I arrived, she was warm and endearing. She reminded me of the teachers I had had; her style was clear. She had values that I liked. She reassured me that my son could succeed. She gave me pointers on how not to feed into his fears. We worked out a plan to help him from home so that he would improve in class. My son, his teacher, and I have been successful as a team. He reads and writes at a very acceptable level. He reads comic books and news articles. He even writes stories about everything that comes to mind. I am so proud to see his enthusiasm. He is now on the A/B honor roll again. He met the challenge and came out a winner. This was a good experience for me also. I learned that this teacher has my child's best interest at heart, and I learned to trust her as well. I see good old values displayed at this school. Against the odds, and all of the problems that many students have at home, this school builds confidence. I am happy and proud that my children are a part of a successful inner-city school. I am convinced that quality education is a state of mind and the willingness of educators to give each child a desire to succeed."

Story Submitted by a Parent
Hilliard Elementary School
North Forest ISD, Houston

"He was so Excited He Read it Twice."

"When beginning at a new school I always like to start with a blank slate. I try not to read their [student] files until I've spent some time with them [students] trying to develop my own opinion of their abilities, behavior and personalities. Well, that's how I began with Patrick. He seemed somewhat reluctant although I could tell he wanted to achieve. Often his response to affection or discipline was pulling away or dropping his head. It became very apparent he had very low self-esteem and confidence. But beneath it were beaming eyes and the most beautiful smile.

Patrick has a lot of ability and drive. His confidence lay in his handwriting and his math. His reading was an obvious weakness. It became apparent whenever we worked on an assignment that required

reading, his entire disposition would change. He became aggressive and distracted. If he wasn't causing a disturbance he would have his head down on the desk inattentively. I called for conferences with his mother and after several phone conversations we finally met.

She was attentive and appeared supportive. I gave her several suggestions that would help to strengthen Patrick's reading. After several weeks of incomplete homework assignments and continued conversations with his mother (she often gave assurance that she was working with him), I realized there was no true support from home. Patrick was placed in my reading group, Reading Mastery II. Knowing that being in third grade and reading on a second grade level has to be embarrassing, I had to work to get his confidence up. He really enjoyed the program. It was set up for success in learning. It was still hard to work with him one-on-one in a whole class setting. By the end of the first six weeks, I began to tutor Patrick. We began working with his math because he enjoyed that so much. It helped develop a rapport with him and a sense of trust. He even began to tutor some other students. He began to enjoy staying after school as time went on. It was partially for the attention. We slowly began to work more on reading skills and his confidence began to grow.

Patrick was recommended for the After School Enrichment Program which began during the second six weeks. The first forty-five minutes of this program allowed Patrick time to complete his homework, practice he was not getting at home. The program gave him even more practice in reading and it fed his stronger area: math. It also gave him more positive feedback on his abilities from other teachers. Before Christmas, Patrick began missing the after-school classes. Phone contact with his mother was made and her reasoning was due to transportation. I soon provided a shuttle service to continue his participation in the program. There were many enlightening trips home, but one I remember the most. We stopped at a convenience store for snacks. It was the first time I could remember direct, long eye contact. He stopped before getting out of the car and said, "Thanks, Ms. Western".

In January we started our Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) practice. This was a challenge for me as well as my students. In the beginning the format was the challenging part. The practice was on a second grade level. This was a part of the continued effort to increase student confidence. This too aided his improvement. He was so proud of himself. After the first week he scored in the nineties. This gave him

the drive to work harder. For the next two months we continued with enrichment in math and reading through games, puzzles, and peer tutoring. The entire teaching staff was there for encouragement. His second grade teacher, Mrs. A. Bryant, and the principal, Mrs. Bonton, often checked in on his progress. This type of confidence building couldn't be bought. In January we entered Reading Mastery III. Patrick's progress in reading continued to develop. His confidence in himself was finally apparent when he completed his first chapter book. He was so excited he read it twice. I was so excited for him I told every staff member I passed that day.

Throughout the year it still hadn't become clear where his father was. However, it was clear Patrick spent a lot of time alone and unsupervised. In April, I took my class on a camping trip and invited Patrick to attend. His mother gave her consent without reservations. Patrick was very excited. We spent two days and one night with fifty other students in the woods. It was obvious he had never gone camping and on the trip home I knew he would never forget this experience. As the practice for TAAS continued it was taken from a third to a fourth grade level by the week prior to TAAS. Patrick's confidence in himself was so strong there was no way he could not have been successful. He has worked hard and has seen what he can do if he puts his mind to it. At the beginning of each year I always ask my students what they plan on becoming. He came to me with no aspirations for his future. Patrick once said, "I don't know and it doesn't matter anyway". Now when I ask him, his response is, "A truck driver or policeman might be cool". Next year he'll be in fourth grade. He's a much stronger student with focused potential. He knows now that anything is possible."

Story Submitted by
Cassandra Western, Teacher
Pietzsch Elementary School
Beaumont ISD

"Miracles do Happen When Everyone Works in Cooperation."

"Soon after tiny Marie Rey bounced into our summer Jump Start program, it became evident that she did not possess adequate skills in reading, language, or math. She was functioning at least a year below

the average students, and she had great difficulty focusing and staying on task. Even though Marie rarely completed an assignment, her bubbly disposition kept her from being discouraged. Her teachers, however, were very discouraged when, at the end of the summer, she showed little progress. Since Marie was very petite and somewhat immature, we considered her to be an ideal candidate for retention.

We scheduled a parent conference in which we explained that an extra year in first grade would allow Marie to "catch up" with the other students physically, developmentally, and academically, and would allow her to have a successful experience instead of a frustrating one in which she would probably fail. Marie's parents were devastated by our recommendations as they had no idea she was performing below grade level. She had received passing grades the previous year, and she was their first child, so they had no basis of comparison. Clearly stunned by our comments, they wanted some time to consider our plan. By the following morning the Rey family reached their decision: They wanted Marie to be placed in second grade even though we held little hope for her success. They promised to work with her at home as much as necessary, and even offered to hire a tutor for her. Concerned by their distress and impressed by their obvious sincerity, the teachers all agreed, and Marie entered second grade.

The year that followed showed what miracles can be accomplished when parents, teachers and students agree on a goal and commit themselves wholeheartedly to achieving that goal. First, we determined that Marie would be assigned the same teachers she had in Jump Start to minimize the time needed for transition and assessment. She was comfortable with us, and we knew her areas of weakness, so we could all "hit the floor running" when school began. Also, we placed her in small classes where Marie could receive the individual help she needed, and we tutored her after school to help her catch up. Additionally, parents and teachers remained in constant contact. Each Friday, the teachers sent home a written preview of the spelling, vocabulary, and homework to be assigned the next week so the her parents could preteach and practice with Marie over the weekend. This they did faithfully, as Marie never missed a homework assignment. Frequently, she would turn in the homework for the whole week when she arrived in class on Monday. Most importantly, both teachers and parents continually emphasized their desire for her success, and she rose to meet our expectations. Mrs. Rey checked in every afternoon when she picked Marie up, to see how the day had gone and to find out

if any special help was needed that night. She also checked Marie's conduct folder to see if she had been attentive during instruction. Sitting still and listening were monumental tasks for the irrepressible Marie, but she gave it her best effort.

When the first grading period ended, the results of our efforts were still in doubt. Marie earned passing grades (barely) and most of the lessons had reviewed concepts introduced in first grade. When the next report cards came, however, Marie had clearly made progress. Her grades were higher, and she was mastering new material. The parents were as delighted as the daughter, and Mrs. Rey confided that her personal goal was for Marie to make the A-B Honor Roll. That dream became a reality the third grading period when Mr. & Mrs. Rey received notification that Marie would be recognized at the awards assembly. Mr. Rey took time off from work so he could attend and photograph Marie receiving her Honor Roll ribbon. Parents and teachers all smiled through a few tears as a beaming Marie proudly held up her award. Marie has continued to improve, and has even earned a year-end honor for her academic success. Miracles do happen when everyone works in cooperation to reach a common goal."

Story Submitted by
"A Proud Teacher"
West Avenue Elementary School
North East ISD, San Antonio

"Students Know Many People are Rooting for Them."

Cheerleaders play an important role at Lamar Elementary School. Cheerleaders are members of the staff, from secretaries to auxiliary personnel, who "adopt" a class and serve as mentors for the students in that class. Says a teacher, "The secretary is mine. I send them down and she gives them candy when they get a 100. It motivates them." In this way students come to learn that they are part of a school community and that within that community there are many people rooting for them. As well, staff members not traditionally included as such come to be seen as a valued part of the support network for students.

Teacher
Lamar Elementary School
Corpus Christi ISD

"When the Migrant Families Return...We Tell Them We Missed Them."

When asked about specific strategies for educating the large migrant student population at Pearson, Ms. Parras, the principal, replies, "We tell them they have to be in school." When they are in Mission "they have to adapt to our school climate." She continues, "When the families come in [from being away for some months] we make a big to-do about it, saying we missed them." Pearson staff collaborates with district personnel to ensure quality educational programs for migrant students. Says the Instructional Supervisor, "There's a Project Smart satellite hook-up nation-wide. Our district Migrant Coordinator makes sure that the students have access to the facilities up there [In states to which they migrate]. She's great for us--she gets what she can for the kids." Ms. Parras concurs: "We counsel the parents that they should evaluate the schools, we tell them what to look for...I'm a product of migrant life, so I know. We tell parents to meet with schools and we tell them to demand real work for the kids--no coloring." Manifest in the way Pearson staff works with migrant students and their families is their shared belief that "all children can learn" and their mission to not "leave our kids behind." In the end, "We don't see them as migrant students. They are Pearson students. There is no distinction."

Mona Parras, Principal
Lucille Pearson Elementary School,
Mission ISD

"Through My Mother's Eyes"

Girl's Day is a special event that happens each year at Scott Elementary School. This is a day that all the girls and their mothers are

invited to the school for a special presentation. One of the teachers that is on the Girl's Day committee explained the goal of Girl's Day, "It is a special day to build up self esteem. I am partial to that day because I am on the committee. The highlight of the day is 'Through My Mother's Eyes'. Mothers read letters they have written to their daughters of the joy they brought to them. I had one girl tell me, 'My mother can't write'. So I told her, 'Let her say it to you, we want everybody to be included.' We tell them

how wonderful it is to have parents." During this part of Girl's Day the mothers sat in a circle with their daughters in front of them. The mothers all read their letters to their daughters. There was a lot of hugging and not a dry eye in the circle.

Teacher
Scott Elementary School
Houston ISD

"I Don't Really Care About the Kids' Backgrounds, I Care About the Individual Himself."

Boys Ranch High School is situated in a large ranch in the hills 60 miles outside of Amarillo. It was created over 50 years ago to school and house "troubled boys" [now boys and girls]. The students have come to live on the ranch for different reasons, often coming with family and behavioral problems, or missing significant schooling before they arrive. Students come from all over the United States to live with foster families, work and study on the ranch. The Building Trades teacher was the last teacher in the school [due to policy changes] who both lives with the students, as part-time house parent, and teaches. He told a story about a boy who came to the school with a failing record. He said, " I only later really found out what kind of success he had arrived at here--where he had come from and where he ended up--I never really asked him about background because I don't really care about the kids' backgrounds, I care about the individual himself. All of us have backgrounds and most of us don't really want to relive some of our past and I feel like he is the same way. I work with the kids from when I get them to where we want them to be.--Actually his mama had left the boys to raise themselves, and he came to us with straight F's on his report cards; so, he had to repeat his ninth grade year. I just happened to be associated with that home at that time and was just sitting with the young man at the dinner table. I had talked him into getting into the building trades organization. He was in my program for a year and then the second year, I was living out here on the ranch. He got involved in the leadership part of the program, and through the course of his sophomore, junior and senior years, he put forth a lot of

effort and he won numerous awards in our building trades program. The highest honor was between his junior and senior years when we went to national competition and this young man, who came to us as a straight F student, spent his senior year as the national vice president of the 350,000-member Vocational and Industrial Clubs of America."

Building Trades Teacher
Boys Ranch High School
Boys Ranch ISD

"Now We've Seen Bilingual Education Work Here."

As we discussed the many improvements to El Magnet at Zavala Elementary School over the last three years, the sixth grade teachers explained how the school was responding to the changing strengths and needs of students. The school had previously offered bilingual education, but the focus had been on English as a Second Language (ESL) methods, with bilingual education offered at some grades and not at others. They now have two sections of bilingual education at every grade level, and the regular classroom teachers are using ESL strategies in their classrooms. A fourth grade bilingual teacher went on to say, "The teachers in the program before didn't truly believe in it [bilingual education] and there wasn't any support. Now there's lots of studies, and we have seen it work here. A consistent bilingual program helps if students are taught in their native language in the early grades. So I'm not struggling in the fourth grade with the foundation. A strong foundation helps them make the transition to English." Part of the support for bilingual education is provided by lowering the class size. Bilingual classes at Zavala have 12 to 13 students, while regular classes have more than 20. The district provides support for bilingual teachers by paying them a stipend, and assists bilingual teachers in getting certified at a local university.

Fourth Grade Bilingual Teacher
El Magnet at Zavala Elementary School
Ector County ISD, Odessa

"Money is Not Going to be an Excuse to Miss Out."

Just before the end of an interview with a fourth grade teacher, the question was asked, "Is there anything else you'd like to add that might help us understand what contributes to your success?" She responded by saying, "We tell the kids that money is not an excuse for them not to participate in any activity. It's why we are successful. One of my students was not a problem all year. Suddenly he became a holy terror! I could not understand it. One day at a graduation rehearsal, he got mad, threw a temper tantrum and ran. He talked to one of the lunchroom aides and admitted to her that he was upset because his mother didn't have the money to buy him a shirt and a pair of pants for graduation. Well this aide, you know they don't make a lot of money, she bought him a shirt and pants for graduation. That's what I mean when I say, we will do whatever is necessary to make them succeed. It's not just the administration, or the just the teachers, it's everyone! Our rule is that money is not going to be an excuse to miss out on anything. Its that kind of thing that makes us special."

Fourth Grade Teacher
Hilliard Elementary School
North Forest ISD, Houston

"The Kids Learned There are Degrees of Blindness."

A fourth grade teacher at Isaacs Elementary School related the following, "Last year, there was this mother that was home-schooling her child. She asked me if she could come and sit in on my class a few days during the week. I agreed and she did this for about four weeks. Her daughter is legally blind, that is why she was schooled at home. The mother felt that she didn't have the experience to help her daughter, so she asked me if she could join my class with an aide. This was in October and November. I knew that at her other school she was disruptive and would curse at the other students, so I really didn't want her to come in my class. I was so apprehensive. I was scared too. I felt like I couldn't say no, so I agreed. I shared my feelings with the kids. I talked about how I would need their help too. I tried to prepare them

for anything that might happen. They wanted to assist her in everything. We learned that she could see some things if the light was right, so the kids made sure the lighting was right for her. They were so respectful of her and they all made me so proud. At first it was a shock, but soon the kids learned that there are degrees of blindness. I got them used to it and they were more accepting. I asked the kids how they would feel if they were her, and then what they might want from other kids if they were her. They surprised me and treated her like they wanted to be treated. At first she was really withdrawn and disruptive on occasion. By February, she was more open and getting along with the other students. I was really scared and worried at first but little did I know how special it would be to me now."

Fourth Grade Teacher
Isaacs Elementary School
Houston ISD

"Acceleration - Not Remediation"

In their endeavor to improve student performance, East Side teachers took advantage of a district-sponsored program, Project ExCell. According to Vice Principal Sosa, "The Federal Program Director was thinking of [a] multi-aged grouping" program funded with "Chapter One." The program provides funds to lower class size and for teachers to stay with a class for two years and two summer school sessions. Teachers in the program have around 15 students. Several teachers at East Side volunteered to pilot the program. They designed it so that teachers would begin with classes the summer before the first, second and third grade years and stay with those children through their movement to second, third and fourth grades, respectively. Three teachers explained that with the funds from the program "We tried lots of new stuff with the kids--barbecues, parental involvement. Also we gave a lot of our time--night movies, sleep-overs. The staff in the program gets along real well. We work a lot together...We're friends." One teacher says, "I couldn't get parents here my first year of teaching. Now they're here all the time. Just them feeling that there is a special place for their kids, it's pulled them in." But it is not just hard work on the part of the teachers and parents that

make it work. Teachers praised the administration's support of their ideas and experiments. For example, "going to tables" in the classrooms instead of individual student desks "was a big step for the administration but they said, try it!" As well, "we use our curriculum coordinator and she gets us anything we need. She's a friend of ours, she's helpful.

Students feel "pulled in," too: "Now the kids know all the Excel teachers well. Last summer [their second in the program] we mixed them all up, second, third and fourth. We looked at strengths and weaknesses and divided up the teaching by our strengths. We changed the kids a lot between us." During summer they offered their students "acceleration--not remediation. We did thematic units, cooking, fun stuff." After the first year, teachers were excited about continuing with their same group of students because it "saves time with assessment. I know my kids well. We just kept rollin' at the beginning of the second year." When asked how they were able to pull off such an intense program, the teachers said quite matter-of-factly, "We don't really do anything that special. [We] just gave more of our time. It's nothing that anyone else couldn't do!"

Vice-Principal Sosa and Project
ExCell Teachers
East Side Elementary School
San Felipe-Del Rio CISD

"When You Need to Run--Run to My Office."

Teachers and administrators at T. A. Brown Elementary School collaborate closely to provide quality instruction and a feeling of trust and family for their students. Ms. Hinojosa says that she often receives notes from teachers that a student "needs tender loving care (TLC)." So, she says, "I give it to them. I want them to know that I'm interested in their well being. I'm here for my students." That such notes requesting "TLC" are routine demonstrates a trusting relationship between students and the principal. Another example is that of a student in a class for emotionally disturbed students who "often just runs away from his class, with no warning. He would just run out, anywhere." The approach that Ms.

Hinojosa took to this troubling situation is creative, and depends on the trust and close ties between her the student. "I told him if he's going to run away, he has to come here, to my office. So," Ms. Hinojosa added, "he'll show up now and then."

Principal
T. A. Brown Elementary School
Austin ISD

"It's Not For Us, It's For the Kids."

The spirit of experimentation at Sagamore Hill Elementary School is pervasive. Says a parent volunteer, "The whole school is a challenge, but in the cafeteria I'm thinking of different kinds of arrangements." Her goal is to streamline movement in the cafeteria and hence make lunch time more calm. In addition she would like to use lunch time to create more positive incentives for kids. "I'd like to get round tables. Maybe the kids with full attendance that week get to sit at the special table...First I have to talk to the head janitor. I'll go talk to the principal about it, then I'll go show him [the janitor. It's not for us, it's for the kids."

Parent Volunteer
Sagamore Hill Elementary School
Fort Worth ISD

"They will Seat Me Somewhere in the Kitchen and We will Get Right to Work."

A teacher at Marcell Elementary School told about visiting his students' homes on Saturdays to tutor, "We do tutoring here Mondays and Tuesdays for an hour. Then the ones I still feel need extra help on a one-to-one basis, I can go to their homes. So far, I haven't had anyone tell me 'no.' I try to make the parents feel comfortable. I'm sure they are kind of nervous. I just let them know that I am here to help their

child. They will seat me somewhere in the kitchen, or somewhere else, and we'll get right to business. I will have the student do a couple of problems and I'll try to look for the process. They don't have to do exactly what I would do, if they can show me their thinking, the process [they used] to arrive at their answer. When I discover why they are getting a particular objective wrong, I show them a different way."

Teacher
Leo Marcell Elementary School
Mission ISD

"We're All Dedicated to One Thing."

When she was asked to comment on why she thinks Wolffarth has been so successful, a teacher who has been there for six years attributed it to the staff and the students. "We have a very dedicated staff and we are all dedicated to one thing, and that is student learning. If we have to stay at school until 6:30, we do it and if we have to get here early, we do it. If we all have to meet together, we do it. Just whatever it takes, we have to be willing to do it. Many of us are here until 6 o'clock at night. We all love each other, work together and support each other and lean on each other. There are times we don't always agree with each other but there is a spirit of compromise. We all know we can't all have our own way. No one is right all of the time, and we all know that. The students are wonderful. I have students who are reading at third or fourth grade level. I have some who are reading at kindergarten level. We all work together and help each other. They love me and I love them. I have been gone three days, and have to be gone tomorrow because my uncle is having surgery, and they are saying "no, no, not again." So they must want to be here, and if they want to be here, I want to be here. I try to be a fun teacher. You can't just sit at your desk. I try to make things fun. We laugh and giggle. They don't realize they are learning, but they are."

Teacher
George C. Wolffarth Elementary School
Lubbock ISD

"I Didn't Give Up on Him."

A teacher with twelve years teaching experience related a recent success story. "Last year I had a student that was probably emotionally disturbed. His family background was a disaster, he was explosive, irrational but very bright, an "A" student. He could not handle PE and music though. He was OK in the classroom. Mr. Ross and I talked with the family but they were irrational too. Mr. Ross worked with him, I worked with him. I thought one of us would die. The PE and music teacher wanted him tested for resource [special education]. But if he was in resource I would miss him; he had an interesting sense of humor. I worked with him all year and then had him tested for gifted and talented and he is gifted and talented. He is one of my favorites. He threw his desk over one time, he was just kind of bonkers. This year the nurse saw him and said, 'I don't see you in the office this year, what happened?' He said, 'Mrs. Anderson.'" When asked what she thinks she did to help this student the teacher stated, "I didn't give up. I worked with him to reach his potential. I had to give him space. There was a time that you could not get him to follow rules. The children seemed to understand that he was not going to conform to certain things. But I had to see him as a complete individual." When the teacher was asked who supported her in working with this student she replied, "Our principal and our counselor. The counselor had him in individual and group [counseling] and she just supported me. She served as a sounding board. Mr. Ross kept him in his office, not for punitive reasons but just to give him a break. When I saw him going down the drain I would tell him to go to the assistant principal and to come back when he was ready. It took a long time for me to see that this student was gifted and talented, because the behavior got in the way."

Teacher
Sunrise Elementary School
Amarillo ISD

"I Can Do This--I Know What She is Talking About."

A bilingual teacher at Carr Elementary School told a success story. "I had one just after Christmas. His little light just came on. He came in from down south. When I first got to know him I questioned if he had been in school before. His records show that he did attend kindergarten for a year, although I never would have known it. After Christmas, one day he answered one question. I know what I did, I tried a new story mapping procedure that we had learned. I went to an inservice on story mapping using big pieces of butcher paper. It is a wonderful procedure. He really got into it. His hand just went up and after he answered the first two, it was like, 'I can do this. I know what she is talking about.' Ever since then, his hand has not come down. He was so shy and withdrawn. That is why it took so long to find out which way to go with him, he was so quiet. But that worked for him. I think it was that story mapping that gave him confidence, because he was able to relate verbally, based on his prior knowledge. Before, trying to read from the basal wasn't working for him. Now I use it at least once a week. Everyone has an opportunity to participate. Later on they came and did the inservice here. I love it."

Bilingual Teacher
C. F. Carr Elementary School
Dallas ISD

"These Kids Need the Time with Their Parents."

A Content Mastery Teacher was observed meeting with a parent to show her how to help her child with the homework assignment for the day. When asked to tell about the meeting, the teacher said, "That is a parent of one of my content mastery students. He is having trouble with his homework at home, and she was unable to help him. She called and asked me if I would have some time to meet with her. I told her the time that I

am available, so she comes in whenever she can. Today I was teaching her some techniques to use with fractions. I really enjoy doing that. The kids really need that time with their parents, so I do what I can to get them involved."

Content Mastery Teacher
Kate Burgess Elementary School
Wichita Falls ISD

"You Know, I Learn Something About My Son."

A parent of a sixth grader at Los Fresnos Intermediate School told about how she learned more about her son; how to better learn about him; and learn through him. "You know, I learn something about him very frequently. I've learned who he is as an individual while he's here in school. His self-esteem has gone up so high. He used to not feel very good about himself before coming here, but that has changed, and he makes very good grades now."

"I think his teachers--all three of them, play a major part in his attitude changes, his self-esteem, his finding himself as an individual. I like that they always give him a card, expressing what a great experience it is to them to have him as a student. I gather all the cards he gets from the teachers letting him know 'What you mean to me as a student and what you have done for me as a teacher'. They get involved with the students, the parents and even the surroundings for my child. Not only are they concerned about what happens here [at school], but also they are concerned about what happens at home, which affects his learning here."

"To him it is important that I show a good attitude about the school that he goes to. What I see, I've seen through my son. And every time I come here everyone welcomes me so well.

"Even when his grades came down, Mr. Mendez (one of two assistant principals) sat in on our meeting with the teacher. He wanted to know why his grades went down that way. That was going from A to B, but I was real concerned about it. After that Mr. Mendez said to try to talk

to him daily. I started doing that. His grades went up again and his attitude changed. We make a point to talk about the day at the dinner table or before he goes to bed. Mr. Mendez suggested that I just talk and listen to him; I don't always have to agree with him."

Parent of a Sixth Grader
Los Fresnos Intermediate School
Los Fresnos CISD

"We Felt We Could Grow, Plan Better, Work More Efficiently."

Hueco Elementary School is a year-round, single track school. During intersessions, the school offers a week of half-day instruction for students. Team teaching during intersession was the catalyst for further team teaching, and resolved a rift that had existed between bilingual and monolingual education.

"This past intersession--in which we offer a week's worth of classes, Mr. Gonzalez and I worked together in the same classroom. Since we had a smaller load, we grouped them together and we liked that. We liked the air actually between both of us--we felt like we could grow, plan better, work more efficiently. We said, 'We like working together, so let's team teach these last 12 weeks of school.' Hopefully we're going to continue this on through next year--and there's even talk of some larger rooms that have been divided, they're thinking of tearing down the walls."

"We plan together on the weekends, because we're almost neighbors. He does reading and social studies, I do science and math. I know what's going on in his room, he knows what's going on in mine."

"I've seen a lot of the older faculty opening up, coming out of their shells little by little. At first I noticed they were very anti-change. And slowly things are opening up. Sometimes the monolingual teachers had a very negative attitude towards our bilingual kids in general, not specifically towards one kid. And now we even talk about working

together and team teaching in the same classroom with a monolingual and a bilingual teacher. They're actually considering this now, whereas three years ago, they would have said, 'no way.' Now it is, 'Well, OK, let's see how.' And they seem to be very excited about it. They really want to try."

Bilingual Teacher
Hueco Elementary School
Socorro ISD

"She was Having Problems Dealing With the Tests I was Giving."

"I have a girl in second period class (seventh grade Texas history) who seemed to be giving 100% effort. But the first six weeks she failed. Her problem was her test scores...she had all of her assignments in, turned her folder in, she did all that I asked of her. After the first six weeks, and into the second six weeks, I saw what was happening. She'd have her daily work in, which is worth 40%, but she was having problems dealing with the tests that I was giving. So I modified the tests for her. Since that time she's been able to bring her grade up to 80. She's done fine on the tests, I've been satisfied with her [work] she'll be all right this year."

Seventh and Eighth Grade Teacher
Nixon-Smiley Middle School
Nixon-Smiley ISD

"We'll Listen to Our Own Teachers."

Two years ago, the Annie Sims Elementary School principal resigned, "We loved her, but we couldn't find a principal during that summer. Our first grade teacher took charge all summer and made sure we had our supplies. Even when we still didn't have a principal by the fall... we started school by ourselves." The next principal stayed until last February when she was made a district supervisor. The staff continues the search for another principal, while the day-to-day work

of the school continues seemingly unaffected. "Our steering committee has formulated questions from the entire staff. We're interviewing candidates all week long." One person admits, "... they loaned us a principal once in a while to come over and settle something." Several modest explanations are put forth to answer why the school functions without a principal. "We already had a site-based team in place that we had elected. We have an understanding staff in the office that can handle a lot of questions. We have practice at governing ourselves. We have all-school meetings every six weeks or so."

"I think the central office needs to be given credit for facilitating our efforts. I can't remember the last time I've been told 'no.' They honestly want you to get out there and bring back what will work for your campus. We figured out we don't listen so well to an outsider coming in and telling us what they know. We will listen to our own teachers. So instead of using that money to get a big name, just send 3-4 teachers to get the training and then it's their job to come back and train us."

"You would have to say that we're very vision oriented. We're not happy just sitting and basking in the way things are being done. All the time looking. It can't be because of any one person, because we haven't had the same leader for years, we've had good principals but they've come and gone in the last three years."

"Perhaps it's perseverance? Well I really don't know. We all are committed to do our job and we have a lot of strong personalities that are independent and critical thinkers. We come in and take care of business. Don't get me wrong, we need a principal, there are a lot of things that we can't do. But we're doing fine."

Teachers, before they hired a principal
Annie Sims Elementary School
Mount Pleasant ISD

"The Former Principal's Philosophy"

At the elementary school, it's team building -- a great percentage of the teachers got involved, though there were a few holdouts. Everyone works. Everyone wants to do the best they can."

"My belief is to give the teachers choices, and then hold them responsible for their choices. Whatever it is, make it work for the kids and hold the teacher responsible for the learning of the kids. "

"First, we need to make all the classrooms as even as possible, level the playing field. Not have one room with all the special education kids. When I first started teaching I taught sixth grade, and my first class, I had the "circus" class. Everyone knew, they put all the bad kids in one class and I had them. This is wrong, you shouldn't do this to kids. We have got to quit putting kids in boxes. We have to take off the lid, take down the fences, and let them go. No classifying, no sorting, no separating, everyone has something to contribute."

"The TAAS objectives can be taught with any exercise. We built mousetrap cars, and we challenged the high school physics class to build a car that would go 120 feet. No one can patent the idea, and anyone can steal and improve on it. That philosophy can be brought to the vision of the school."

"We made sure we were not just teaching TAAS. We taught for knowledge and comprehension, and made it important for the kids. We got rid of the career ladder [a merit pay system] and we shared. If someone goes to a workshop they bring it back, all of us need to be smarter, not just one person."

"As the principal, I could have sat back and been the benevolent dictator, that would have been efficient but it would not have been good. The philosophy is: empower the teachers, give them everything they need, throw knowledge, commitment, resources (don't just throw money) at them. We use too many sticks, and not enough carrots."

Former Principal
Cisco Elementary School,
Current Principal at Cisco Junior High School
Cisco ISD

"We've Taken Children Expelled from Other Schools."

More than one teacher at Adams Elementary School told about children who had been expelled from other schools in the district that Adams had agreed to take. A member of the first and second grade

team said, "We have taken other children from time to time under special circumstances. It has to go through the central office. We had one last year that was expelled from his other school. A second grader, and we have had a first grader too. We have always been known to take them. You have to give it a try. In most of the situations it has been pretty positive. It takes lots of patience, plus stability. We really care, we really do care." A third grade teacher, later added, "They bring them over here and we don't seem to have the problems with them. I had a student that they brought over here that was from another school that could not handle it at the other school, was always in trouble. We had no problems with him here. We have one now that they sent from another school over here. They cannot control him over there, and we just don't seem to have that problem with him here. We just give him the normal attention that the others have."

Teachers
Adams Elementary School
Cleburne ISD

"We'll Renovate the Original School Building from 1940."

The Temple Foundation, established by Henry Temple, who founded Temple Inland, the largest taxpayer and major employer in the Apple Springs School District, has awarded several large grants to the district over the last ten or twelve years. Those grants were used for a small administrative wing, computers and a science building. The Principal, Mr. Spencer, said, "This building we are sitting in, we got it in January. We got a $130,000 grant from Temple Inland and the district probably spent $50,000 to $70,000 on the project. The only reason we got that grant was because we were being successful as a school district." Temple Foundation recently awarded another large grant to the district that will be used to renovate the elementary school and improve the library. Speaking of the newest grant, the Superintendent, Dr. Worley, said, "When we first wrote the grant, we had qualified for a facility grant from the state, so we are in the midst of a $500,000 renovation program here, which is a tremendous amount of renovation for a small school like this." The facilities grant is being used to

renovate the original school building that was built in 1940. Dr. Worley went on to tell about plans for the renovation,

"All of the old-timers [graduates as far back at the 1940's] are really excited about it. In fact, they wanted to have a part in it, so they want to buy an expensive chandelier or something for the front entrance. They are going to work with the architect to get something real nice and expensive. We are restoring the original high ceiling and the high windows will be opened up so light will come in, and they want something that will show. That is going to be their [old timers] part. We are bringing them back into the picture.

October each year they have a reunion. It's an all day affair . They had people who drove all the way from North Carolina for the reunion last year. When they say "the old timers", they mean age 59 or 60 and older. They had representatives from all the way back in the 40's. This school was built in 1940 or 1941. We have another homecoming for younger people. It's not a formal program, it's usually in connection with a sports event."

Principal and Superintendent
Apple Springs Elementary School
Apple Springs ISD

"Every Child Will do Well, Regardless of How Much Money his Mama or Daddy Have, What Color He is, Or Anything Else."

Describing Springlake Junior High School, a parent said, "Out here it's mostly sports. There is just about everything to do that a small town can offer. Sometimes I think we are running in circles, but if it wasn't for band or sports, then there would be a lot of kids with too much free time." She went on to say, "There are a lot of expectations about how we want our kids to behave and how we want our school conducted. So many people here were born and raised here and are putting their kids right back through the system. We expect a lot. I think there is a lot of public input. On the other hand, there is a lot of public pride when our school excels in whatever they do." She went on to say, "I hope it shows how proud I am of this school. I am glad that my kids are going to get to graduate from the school that both my husband and I attended. I just hope we are always able to keep our discipline. We are not as

strict as we were when I was in school, but to our kids it seems strict compared to others. I really think that is the key to our success. Our teachers care so much, because a lot of them have lived here a long time. A lot of them went through this school. I do feel like it is the discipline and the expectations that every child in the classroom will do as well as the one sitting next to him, regardless of how much money his mama and daddy have, what color he is, or anything else. I don't know of a teacher out here that doesn't feel that way. I have observed that in my kids' classes. I haven't substituted much, but when I am here, they all act like they are loved and cared for and expected to do their best. There are teachers out here that were here when I was. Mr. Verden was my principal. If they didn't care, they wouldn't stay that long and go through the changes they go through."

Parent and Substitute Teacher
Springlake Junior High School
Springlake-Earth ISD

"When I Get Frustrated, I Remember This is Somebody's Child."

Even in very small schools with small classes, teachers experience challenges. A first grade teacher at Three Way School described her approach to working with a little boy later diagnosed as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD.) "I tried everything, for him and myself, because it gets really frustrating, you know, to fight it day in and day out. I had to work on my attitude. One thing I try to do, because I have a child the same age, is remember that this is somebody's child. That is kind of hard to do, because you only see them at school. I would have to stop sometimes, because I would get so upset. I would just walk away, go out in the hall for a minute, and think, 'Somebody had this baby, somebody sat down and held him, all the things I did as a mom.' That helped." When asked about support she had at school, she said, "I talked to the principal quite a lot, to talk to someone. We tried to work it out so that if he got out of control I would send him down there instead of trying to deal with it myself. That would let him calm down and then we could work on the situation."

First Grade Teacher
Three Way School
Three Way ISD, Maple

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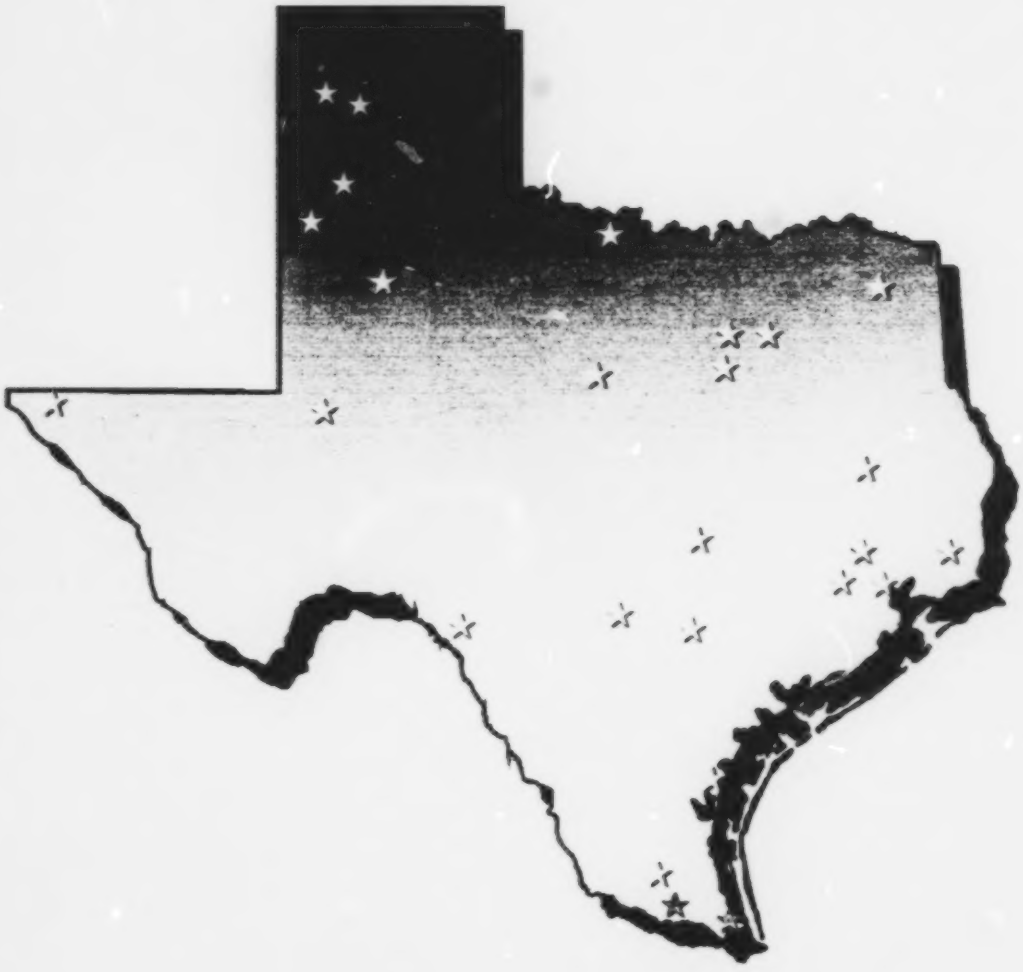

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INTRODUCTION

The Charles A. Dana Center recently completed a study of twenty-six high-achieving, high-poverty schools in Texas. Each school has its own unique social and cultural make-up, and has developed particular strengths to address the needs of its community. Some of these schools are located in rural areas, others in urban settings. Language arts curriculum varied from whole language to phonics approaches. Where some schools used constructivist learning approaches, others engaged in direct teaching. Charismatic leadership styles and personalities were found in some of the schools, but not in all. Even the presence of instructional technology had a broad divergence, with some schools representing cutting edge uses, while in others computer technology was all but absent.

What these schools did have in common, however, was a core of interrelated characteristics which have been grouped into seven themes: (1) Focus on Academic Achievement for Every Student; (2) No Excuses; (3) Experimentation; (4) Inclusivity; (5) Sense of Family; (6) Collaboration and Trust; and (7) Passion for Learning and Growing. The evidence of these themes varied considerably in the different schools. Nonetheless, the themes reflect a foundation of attitudes and strategies that makes academic success possible for all students.

To help other schools improve student learning, the Charles A. Dana Center has developed this Self-Study and Planning Guide drawing from the Successful Schools Research Project. The seven themes outlined above provide the direction for a structured process by which a school can begin the evaluation and planning necessary for school improvement. School communities may use this guide to create opportunities for group reflection, evaluation, and brainstorming in regards to school improvement goals and strategies. The guide is designed to allow for maximum flexibility in its use. Individuals, small groups of school personnel, existing planning and decision-making bodies, or larger group settings within the community-at-large will all gain valuable insights from these exercises.

Each module in this guide corresponds to one of the seven themes, and contains worksheets with questions that promote self-evaluation as the starting point for the planning process. The questions are divided according to indicators that provide direction for the self-study and planning activities. Critical self-assessment, goal setting, and planning are the intended results of the discussions centered on the philosophy and practices of successful schools. The last worksheet in each module is designed to organize the information gained and to aid in developing an individualized campus plan. This guide is currently being field tested and will be revised as needed after adequate feedback has been obtained. Please add to our database of information by filling out the Feedback Form at the end of this packet and returning it to us.

Used in conjunction with the Video Discussion Guide, the Self-Study and Planning Guide provides a school with the means to identify areas of concern, explore conditions in each of those areas, and begin the process of planning for school improvement that is vital to the Campus Improvement Plan. This encourages school communities to create benchmarks by which progress toward identified goals can be measured and to revisit progress at appropriate intervals. Timelines for these activities will vary with each school. However, the success of self-study and planning to improve student achievement depends on providing adequate time and encouraging the school community in this concentrated effort.

Suggestions for Using the Self-Study and Planning Guide

In order to effectively use the thematic modules in this guide, the school will need to determine which individual(s) or existing team(s) would best undertake the study of each module or if a new team(s) should be formed to conduct the study. The procedure for approval of the school improvement strategies resulting from the completion of this study should also be established in order to ensure that action will result from this process.

An initial review of each thematic module is necessary to determine if the information required to answer all questions is available or will need to be gathered before beginning the study. If a school begins the study immediately by answering the questions that do not require additional information, a timeline should be established for the gathering of information and completion of the questions related to the data. Also, a study group may want to begin with the module(s) considered most critical to school improvement. A timeline for undertaking and completing each module should be established to support the successful completion of the process.

After answering the questions found in the thematic modules, the group may determine that it needs to seek additional information as a part of its continued school improvement initiative. The individual(s) or team(s) experienced with this process of self-study and planning might create new questions that need to be asked in light of the new data.

The process of self-study and planning advocated in this guide encourages school communities to identify strategies that support the seven themes from the research study and begin to synthesize these strategies with the successful practices and dynamics already in place at the individual schools. This collaborative process reflects the alignment and commitment of the school community to school improvement.

GLOSSARY

Campus Improvement Plan	-	Each public school in the state of Texas is required to develop and revise annually a plan that outlines strategies for school improvement. The plan must include a mission statement, campus performance objectives, designation of resources, time lines, means of measurement, and strategies for implementing curriculum, instruction, staff development, and parental involvement improvements.
Site-Based Decision Making	-	According to Texas law, public schools are required to have in place an active group of school community members (including parents and students as appropriate) to make site decisions regarding staffing, staff development, curriculum, instruction, and implementation strategies.
TAAS/TAAS Objective	-	The Texas Academic Assessment of Students (TAAS) is the standardized test required to be used for assessment of student academic performance by the public schools in the state of Texas. The TAAS objectives determine the knowledge and skills measured by the TAAS test.
School Community	-	The term "School Community" as used in this document includes all teachers, administrators, parents, support personnel, members of the community, and students in the school and indicates a relationship based on belonging to the same community.

Thematic Module I: Focus on Academic Achievement for Every Student

Successful schools share a common mission: the academic success of all students. This mission encompasses two key elements: (1) each school needs to keep its attention focused on the academic development of each student; and (2) each school needs to aim for success for each student.

Indicator A: Making Decisions for Academic Achievement

Decisions are driven by the mission of academic achievement. This includes all decisions about curriculum; instructional strategies (including lesson plans); staff development; budget; scheduling; and the use of staff, building space, ancillary personnel, volunteers, or any other resources.

Reflective Questions	Response
Are the goals for academic achievement for each student clear and measurable? Does everyone understand the goals?	
To what extent does the Campus Improvement Plan establish challenging academic goals for all students, taking into account students in migratory situations, students developing English proficiency, students who recently immigrated, students experiencing homelessness, students with disabilities, students who meet low-income or gifted and talented criteria?	
Who developed the school mission statement? Does the mission statement truly reflect the mission of the school?	

Indicator A: Making Decisions for Academic Achievement, Continued

Reflective Questions	Response
List the three most important decisions made by school personnel this past year. How does each decision relate to the mission of academic success for every student?	
Who participates in decisions about: curriculum, instructional strategies (including lesson plans), staff development, scheduling, budget, use of staff, building space, ancillary personnel, volunteers, or other resources?	
Does the Campus Improvement Plan consistently reflect the mission of academic achievement for each student?	

Indicator B: Planning for Academic Achievement

Curriculum, staff development, textbook selection, and technology purchases are aligned to ensure that students will successfully attain TAAS objectives, as well as attaining other objectives deemed important by school personnel, which extend beyond TAAS requirements.

Reflective Questions	Response
How have curriculum, textbook selection, and technology purchases been aligned to focus success on TAAS and other school goals?	
Review the campus professional development activities for the past six months. How are those activities aligned with the goals for student achievement?	
How does the budget support these challenging goals?	

Indicator C: Using Assessment for Academic Achievement

Assessment data are consistently used to determine how to improve teaching and learning in order for all students to attain TAAS objectives as well as attaining other objectives deemed important by school personnel, which extend beyond TAAS requirements.

Reflective Questions	Response
How does your school measure academic success?	
How are TAAS and other related assessment data used to identify and to respond to the strengths and needs of each student and each teacher? How often is this done?	
How and how often are other goals monitored and assessed?	
How does the Campus Improvement Plan address the needs of students who are not currently achieving at a high academic level? To what extent is this section of the plan implemented?	
Have specific challenging performance objectives been established for those students who are not currently achieving academic success?	

Indicator C: Using Assessment for Academic Achievement, Continued

Data Questions	Response
What do the data reveal to be the current achievement for all students on TAAS?	
What do the data reveal to be the current achievement for all students on the other measures?	
What do the TAAS data reveal to be the current achievement for:	
Students in migratory situations?	
Students developing English proficiency?	
Students who recently immigrated?	
Students experiencing homelessness?	
Students with disabilities?	
Students who meet low income criteria?	
Students in gifted and talented programs?	
Each ethnic group?	
Boys and girls?	

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Indicator C: Using Assessment for Academic Achievement, Continued

Data Questions	Response
What do other measures reveal to be the current achievement for:	
Students in migratory situations?	
Students developing English proficiency?	
Students who recently immigrated?	
Students experiencing homelessness?	
Students with disabilities?	
Students who meet low income criteria?	
Students in gifted and talented programs?	
Each ethnic group?	
Boys and girls?	

Indicator D: Sharing Accountability for Academic Achievement

All members of the school community (teachers, administrators, parents, support personnel, members of the community and students) share a sense of accountability to ensure the academic success of every student.

Reflective Questions	Response
How is a shared accountability for the academic success of all students repeatedly communicated to all members of the school community? Do all members of the school community frequently mention, on a voluntary basis, that "we are all responsible for all of the students"? Has this accountability assumption become deeply embedded in the culture of the school community?	
In what specific ways are new teachers/staff selected, monitored and evaluated to ensure improvement of student academic achievement?	

What else is happening at our school that demonstrates our focus on academic success?

In what other ways might the mission of academic success for every student be furthered?

Given the review of the data on current levels of student achievement and our commitment to academic achievement, what will be the school's challenging goals for the academic achievement of all students, as well as for special populations of students? (Note: Ultimate goals for special populations of students should never be less than the goals for the general population.)

Use this worksheet to organize your information and to develop your Campus Improvement Plan.

What schoolwide reform strategies will you use to ensure a strong focus on the academic achievement of every student?	How will you determine if the strategies are accomplishing the goals? What benchmarks will you use?	What resources will you use to implement the strategies?	Given an assessment of your progress, what, if any, reformations of strategies and/or goals are necessary at this point to ensure academic success for every student?

When will you revisit and evaluate the goals, strategies and progress towards projected outcomes established here?

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Thematic Module II: No Excuses

There are no acceptable excuses for the failure of any student. Successful schools believe all students should be able to succeed, regardless of the problems facing the student, home-related issues, resource difficulties, or any other mitigating circumstances.

Indicator A: Working with Rules for Improvement

The school and its representatives are willing to challenge rules that do not serve students well and to negotiate changes that are in the best interest of students.

Reflective Questions	Response
Are there rules that the school community perceives as not in the best interest of students? If so, have there been efforts to negotiate changes in those rules?	
In situations where state or federal rules are barriers, have waivers been sought?	

Indicator B: Taking Responsibility for Improvement

When results do not meet expectations, educators do not blame outside forces, others, or each other. Instead, they reflect upon their own efforts to find opportunities to improve.

Reflective Questions	Response
Both formally and informally, who does the school community say is responsible for non-attainment of goals or failure to meet expectations, such as expectations for individual, classroom, and schoolwide TAAS scores?	
What happens when significant goals or expectations are not met? How does the school community respond to such failures? Discuss specific examples.	
What resources have been utilized to help the school community maintain their energy and enthusiasm to promote an attitude of "no excuses"?	
To what extent do educators evidence different expectations based on student socio-economic status, ethnicity, language background, or other family characteristics? In what ways are these expectations obvious? How do other educators respond when differing expectations are evidenced?	

Indicator B: Taking Responsibility for Improvement, Continued

Reflective Questions	Response
What strategies have been utilized to increase the quantity and quality of the learning experiences of students with home-related issues? (e.g., socio-economic status, migratory status, homelessness)	
For students who don't take TAAS, how is the school ensuring that they are making substantial progress toward challenging academic goals?	
Data Questions	**Response**
What percentage of your students took the TAAS test last year?	
What do the data show to be the exemption rate on TAAS for:	
Students in migratory situations?	
Students developing English proficiency?	
Students who recently immigrated?	
Students experiencing homelessness?	
Students with disabilities?	
Students who meet low-income criteria?	
Each ethnic group?	
Boys and girls?	
Students who are involved with Juvenile Court?	
Students who are involved with Department of Protective and Regulatory Services?	
Students who move often because of home-related issues such as unemployment of a family member?	

Indicator B: Taking Responsibility for Improvement, Continued

Data Questions	Response
What percentage of students with home-related issues are being served in special education classes?	
What percentage of these students have been served at the school (seen the school counselor, received a home visit from a teacher or social worker etc.) to meet their home-related issues?	
What do the data show to be the student attendance for:	
Students in migratory situations?	
Students developing English proficiency?	
Students who recently immigrated?	
Students experiencing homelessness?	
Students with disabilities?	
Students who meet low-income criteria?	
Each ethnic group?	
Boys and girls?	
Students who are involved with Juvenile Court?	
Students who are involved with Department of Protective and Regulatory Services?	
Students who move often because of home-related issues such as unemployment of a family member?	

Indicator C: Using Resources for Improvement

Lack of resources is typically viewed as a challenge that will be overcome. Educators are creative in identifying and pursuing new ways of acquiring resources, both within and outside of the school system to better respond to student needs.

Reflective Questions	Response
What resources have been identified as needed by your school? How has your school sought to fulfill these types of needs in the past? What other creative ways could your school utilize to obtain resources?	
Throughout the school community, what are the general beliefs about needing and obtaining resources? Is there a general belief that the school always finds a way to get needed resources?	
Does the Campus Improvement Plan promote creative use of resources and the development of new resources to ensure that needs are met?	

What are we doing to add to the belief that there are "no excuses"?

In what other ways might the attitude of "no excuses" be furthered?

Use this worksheet to organize your information and to develop your Campus Improvement Plan.

What schoolwide reform strategies will you use to achieve your goals to develop an attitude of no excuses?	How will you determine if the strategies are accomplishing the goals? What benchmarks will you use?	What resources will you use to implement the strategies?	Given an assessment of your progress, what, if any, reformations of strategies and/or goals are necessary at this point to ensure that there are no excuses for the failure of any one student?

When will you revisit and evaluate the goals, strategies and progress towards projected outcomes established here?

Thematic Module III: Experimentation

Schools that work successfully with diverse groups of students use a variety of approaches. The school environment allows all participants--administrators, teachers, parents, students, other staff--the space, resources, and support to experiment, fail, and try again. Such schools anticipate that some new efforts will not be considered successful immediately, and some methods may never work out. Failure, particularly failure from which someone learns, is considered an important part of the educational process.

Indicator A: Supporting Teacher's Experimentation

Teachers are encouraged to experiment as they consider instructional approaches that might improve teaching and learning.

Reflective Questions	Response
Do teachers and administrators feel comfortable experimenting with instructional approaches? Do all school community members feel comfortable with this experimentation?	
Are teachers confident that administrators and parents will support experimentation?	
Identify significant examples of experiments that have succeeded and ones that have failed.	
When teachers or other school personnel present new ideas, do school leaders listen? Is consensus reached about the merit of those ideas? To what extent are school personnel encouraged to pursue their ideas through pilot studies or other experiments?	

Indicator B: Planning/Evaluating Experiments

Educators select and evaluate experiments based on their potential to improve student achievement. Failures are accepted as positive steps toward eventual solutions.

Reflective Questions	Response
To what extent are ideas for experiments researched to determine the likelihood of success? How is that information used before deciding to pursue the experiment?	
Who decides whether to initiate an experimental program? Are evaluation criteria specified prior to implementation of experiments? As experiments are implemented, how is progress monitored and evaluated? How are the data obtained used to determine gains?	
When experiments are considered, what processes are used to insure that everyone involved in the implementation and all those affected by the experiment have a sense of ownership?	
How is failure determined? Who decides if an experiment is a failure and when is the decision made? What data are used to make decisions regarding success and failure?	
How are successes and failures used in the school improvement process? How does the Campus Improvement Plan build on what the school has learned through positive and negative experiences?	
How does the Campus Improvement Plan build on successful activities and programs already begun?	

Indicator C: Learning from Experimentation

School community members share, cooperate, and learn from each others' successes and failures.

Reflective Questions	Response
How do teachers learn from the experiments that occur in other classrooms?	
Identify specific, significant examples of sharing of successes and failures. What results did the sharing produce?	
What experiences of success and/or failure have been used to expand and refine staff development?	
How does the Campus Improvement Plan support the process of developing and refining experimental programs?	

Indicator D: Encouraging Experimentation

Students are encouraged to experiment and to identify new ways to accomplish tasks. Failures are viewed as learning opportunities for both teachers and students.

Reflective Questions	Response
Do students feel safe in trying new ways to accomplish tasks or investigate questions?	
How are students encouraged to engage in learning experiments? How do students use the failure of an experiment as an opportunity to learn? Identify some specific examples of this learning strategy.	
How is experimentation encouraged in all areas of the curriculum?	
How do students and teachers use the failure of experiments as learning opportunities? Identify some specific examples of this learning strategy.	

What are we doing that adds to the attitude of experimentation?

In what other ways might the attitude of experimentation be furthered?

Use this worksheet to organize your information and to develop your Campus Improvement Plan.

What schoolwide reform strategies will you use to achieve your goals to develop an attitude of experimentation?	How will you determine if the strategies are accomplishing the goals? What benchmarks will you use?	What resources will you use to implement the strategies?	Given an assessment of your progress, what, if any, reformations of strategies and/or goals are necessary at this point to further an attitude of thoughtful experimentation?

When will you revisit and evaluate the goals, strategies and progress towards projected outcomes established here?

Thematic Module IV: Inclusivity

Everyone who touches the student is included in the school's success. School staff (including teachers, administrators, counselors, nurses, cafeteria workers, and custodians), as well as community members and parents, contribute to the school's success.

Indicator A: Involving Everyone in School Improvement

School personnel, families, students, and other community members are often involved in the improvement of the school, its programs, curricula, and facilities. As such, everyone who works at the school, attends the school, sends students to the school, or lives in the school's community has a strong sense of ownership in the school and its success. Consequently, everyone's input is solicited in a variety of ways and everyone can participate in important decision-making processes.

Reflective Questions	Response
Who participates in efforts to improve your school? How significant is this participation?	
How are community members and organizations/businesses involved in school improvement efforts?	
What percentage of families are involved in assisting their child with school work at home?	
What percentage of families are involved in participating at school-sponsored social activities?	
What percentage of families are volunteering to assist with special events (e.g. field trips)?	
What percentage of families are volunteering regularly at school?	
What percentage of families are participating in parent-teacher conferences?	

Indicator A: Involving Everyone in School Improvement, Continued

Reflective Questions	Response
What percentage of families are participating in site-based decision making processes?	
What percentage of families are participating in the evaluation of school activities and policies?	
To what extent are families that historically have not been involved in school activities (e.g. parents with limited literacy, families who live in shelters, non-English speaking) participating in the above activities?	
How are volunteers utilized at the school? How might they be recruited?	
How does the school encourage the involvement of office staff, custodial staff, cafeteria workers and other support personnel beyond their traditional roles? To what extent are these personnel involved in decisions that affect the school?	
Are school support staff, (social workers, diagnosticians, counselors) included in the school decision-making process?	
How are educational aides utilized? How might they play a larger role in the school's decision-making processes?	
How are the contributions of all members of the school community acknowledged and valued?	

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Indicator A: Involving Everyone in School Improvement, Continued

Reflective Questions	Response
Was the Campus Improvement Plan developed with the participation of all team members? Who knows and understands the goals and major activities of the Campus Improvement Plan? Who doesn't know? Why?	
In what ways does the Campus Improvement Plan support shared responsibility for high student achievement?	

Indicator B: Encouraging Leadership

Leadership emerges from teachers, counselors, other school personnel, parents, and members of the community. Administrators encourage the development of such leadership.

Reflective Questions	Response
Have teachers, counselors, and other personnel, parents and other members of the school community emerged as school leaders? If so, what do they lead and how significant is their role as a leader? Give significant examples of leadership.	
How are these forms of leadership encouraged? What is being done to prepare members of the school community for broader leadership roles?	
In what ways does the Campus Improvement Plan support emerging leadership?	

Indicator C: Encouraging Family Involvement

Teachers, counselors, school social workers, and school administrators maintain open door policies to encourage families to interact with the school. Family members are given opportunities to build upon their natural teaching roles through work with their children at home and at school. Regular efforts are made to ensure that family members understand what their children are learning in school. Barriers to the involvement of families are identified and directly addressed.

Reflective Questions	Response
How do school personnel encourage families and community members to interact with the school?	
In what ways does the school involve family members in the learning process of their children?	
How are families informed about what their children are learning in school?	
What efforts are made to inform families who do not communicate in English? What special efforts are made to ensure their understanding and maintain their involvement?	
To what extent do family members understand the objectives of TAAS? The Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills? The School Report Card?	
To what extent does the school support families by providing family literacy programs, transportation and child care for meetings, in-home conferences, and other services to meet needs that families might have?	
How does the Campus Improvement Plan support the involvement of families and community members in planning, reviewing and improving programs?	

Indicator D: Encouraging Student Involvement

Students have input into a variety of decisions that influence their school experience. The students themselves have a sense of ownership in the school.

Reflective Questions	Response
How are students involved in decision-making about the school and its success? How frequently does this take place?	
How do you know that students feel ownership for the school and its success?	
How might students become more involved in the decision-making process?	
Were students involved in the development of the Campus Improvement Plan?	

What are we doing that adds to inclusivity?

In what other ways might inclusivity be furthered?

Use this worksheet to organize your information and to develop your Campus Improvement Plan.

What schoolwide reform strategies will you use to achieve your goals for inclusivity?	How will you determine if the strategies are accomplishing the goals? What benchmarks will you use?	What resources will you use to implement the strategies?	Given an assessment of your progress, what, if any, reformations of strategies and/or goals are necessary at this point to ensure that you are reaching your goals for inclusivity?

When will you revisit and evaluate the goals, strategies and progress towards projected outcomes established here?

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Thematic Module V: Sense of Family

The school sees itself as a family, rather than as an institution. Every member is valued, and the school is interested in all aspects of each member's life. Traditional school roles are often blurred as school community members are willing to do whatever is needed to ensure all students do well physically, emotionally, socially and academically.

Indicator A: Respecting the Student

Students are valued and respected as multi-dimensional human beings with richly diverse backgrounds, attributes, and skills. Students know they are valued by school personnel.

Reflective Questions	Response
In what specific ways does the curriculum of the school convey that all students are valued?	
How does the school address the development of the whole student? Are students recognized for non-academic accomplishments? To what extent are all students recognized in positive ways (consider each racial/ethnic group by gender, students with developing English proficiency, students in gifted and talented programs and other special needs groups)?	
To what extent is the cultural and linguistic diversity of the students celebrated through classroom and school activities?	
To what extent are students with special needs separated, or not separated, from other students for academic instruction and extra-curricular activities? What efforts are made to be sure that students with special needs are valued? How might these efforts be improved?	

Indicator A: Respecting the Student, Continued

How are new students and their families (including homeless and highly mobile families) welcomed and made a part of the school family?	
What processes are in place to ensure that these new students have access to the educational programs they need?	
What processes are in place to ensure that these new students have access to appropriate support services?	
How and to what extent are stigmatizing labels avoided and heterogeneous grouping strategies used?	
How and how often is student learning celebrated? How are art, music, and physical education an integral and valued part of the school?	
To what extent are teachers trained in teaching students with different learning styles? To what extent is this training regularly used in the classroom?	
In what ways does the Campus Improvement Plan reflect efforts that will lead to greater valuing and respect for students and their families?	

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Indicator B: Building Relationships with Families

Families and the involvement of families in their children's learning are seen as critically important. School personnel work to build positive relationships with families and create an atmosphere of learning and growth for all family members.

Reflective Questions	Response
What is done to create a friendly, welcoming attitude toward parents? How are parents received in the office and around the school? How and to what extent is parent input considered in creating a welcoming atmosphere? What space is provided for parents at the school?	
In what situations are translation services provided to parents? Are there situations in which such services are not currently provided, but need to be provided?	
How is communication delivered to parents who can't read?	
What is the nature of routine parent/teacher communication? Do all parents receive positive comments about their children? How are student difficulties with academic or social matters addressed with parents.?	
What opportunities are provided at the school for parents to continue their own learning?	
How is the curriculum adapted to reflect the value that is placed on families?	
How is the importance of family reflected in the school's mission statement?	

Indicator B: Building Relationships with Families, Continued

How does the Campus Improvement Plan enhance the capacity of parents to support the learning of their children?	
How does the Campus Improvement Plan build the capacity of school personnel to better support the involvement of parents and community members?	

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Indicator C: Building Relationships Within the School Community

There is a strong sense of family shared by the members of the school community, reflected in actions, beliefs and language.

Reflective Questions	Response
In what specific ways do the school's hiring practices reflect a commitment to a sense of family?	
What actions are being taken to connect and build support networks among all members of the school community?	
How are new members of the school community welcomed and mentored?	
In what ways is the language used to talk about students, parents, and all community members reflective of a sense of family at the school?	
Are there significant segments of the school community (i.e., part-time staff, special programs staff, para-professionals) that do not participate or are not known to the rest of the community? What can be done to include them?	

Indicator D: Making a Comfortable, Safe Environment

Appropriate conduct, for both students and adults, is embedded in the school's culture. The school is a safe, clean, and welcoming place.

Reflective Questions	Response
What is the current absentee rate for teachers?	
What does teacher tenure and attendance indicate about the sense of family at the school?	
How and how often are rules for appropriate conduct of students and adults communicated?	
Is there a schoolwide discipline plan, and in what ways do all school community members uphold it? How do we ensure that rules for students are administered thoughtfully, consistently, and fairly? What do discipline records indicate about discipline practices (consider all student populations and genders)?	

Indicator D: Making a Comfortable, Safe Environment, Continued

Reflective Questions	Response
Think of accidents/incidents that have occurred. What steps have been taken to prevent their reoccurrence? In what ways is the safety of all school community members planned for and enforced by all school community members?	
How do you know that your students feel they are treated with respect? What evidence do you have/need (consider all groups and genders)?	
In what ways does the school's environment and appearance reflect a sense of family?	
How does the Campus Improvement Plan support making the school a safe, clean and welcoming place?	

What are we doing that adds to the sense of family?

In what other ways might a sense of family be furthered?

Use this worksheet to organize your information and to develop your Campus Improvement Plan.

What schoolwide reform strategies will you use to achieve your goals for a sense of family?	How will you determine if the strategies are accomplishing the goals? What benchmarks will you use?	What resources will you use to implement the strategies?	Given an assessment of your progress, what, if any, reformations of strategies and/or goals are necessary at this point to ensure that there is a sense of family?

When will you revisit and evaluate the goals, strategies and progress towards projected outcomes established here?

Thematic Module VI: Collaboration and Trust

The work of all participants in the school is based on collaboration with other participants and trust in the support that will be available. Collaboration and support continue even when efforts are difficult or are succeeding.

Indicator A: Encouraging Open Communication

School personnel openly share concerns and successes, strengths and weaknesses with each other. They provide assistance to each other and learn from each other.

Reflective Questions	Response
What are the formal and informal ways school personnel share concerns and successes?	
How do school personnel, formally and informally, assist each other in learning how to improve student achievement?	
Are sharing and assistance common practices in the school?	

Indicator B: Sharing Decision Making

Teachers and other school personnel share decision-making responsibility related to curriculum, instruction, school organization, and the use of resources. School personnel work together to make high quality decisions. Forums are held in which school personnel openly discuss programs, policies, and practices. School personnel express their concerns freely, helping shape the direction of the school.

Reflective Questions	Response
Who participates in decision-making related to curriculum, instruction, school organization, and use of resources? How are site-based committee members chosen?	
What kinds of forums or other approaches are provided for discussions of programs, policies, and practices? How do these discussions inform the direction of the school?	
How does the Campus Improvement Plan ensure that school personnel will have adequate opportunities to work together and learn from each other?	

Indicator C: Supporting Cooperation

Cooperation extends beyond grade-level groupings as teachers work toward the accomplishment of school goals.

Reflective Questions	Response
What arrangements are in place to support cooperation among teachers? By grade level? Across grade levels? By subject area? Between feeder schools? How frequently does this cooperation occur?	
How are teams of teachers brought together to focus on academic success? How often do they meet?	

Indicator D: Supporting Teachers

Teachers and other school personnel openly take problems to school administrators, since there is no fear of reprisal. Administrators spend more time and energy identifying, acknowledging, and rewarding positive teacher behavior responding to "negative" teacher behavior. When problems arise with teachers, administrators address the problems in a manner that demonstrates respect for the professionalism of the teachers(s) involved.

Reflective Questions	Response
How comfortable do teachers feel about going to the school's administrators with problems? Have there been any reprisals?	
Are administrators seen as supportive of teachers? How is this communicated to teachers?	
Do teachers feel that administrators believe they are capable of teaching well? Do a significant number of teachers feel at odds with administrators? If so, what is being done to address this?	
Do teachers and administrators feel they are all part of the same team, working together for student success?	
How does the Campus Improvement Plan reflect the shared perspective of all participants?	
What strategies in the Campus Improvement Plan support district-wide collaboration and communication for campus improvement?	

What are we doing that adds to collaboration and trust?

In what other ways might collaboration and trust be furthered?

Use this worksheet to organize your information and to develop your Campus Improvement Plan.

What schoolwide reform strategies will you use to achieve your goals for collaboration and trust?	How will you determine if the strategies are accomplishing the goals? What benchmarks will you use?	What resources will you use to implement the strategies?	Given an assessment of your progress, what, if any, reformations of strategies and/or goals are necessary at this point to ensure collaboration and trust?

When will you revisit and evaluate the goals, strategies and progress towards projected outcomes established here?

Thematic Module VII: Passion for Learning and Growing

The work of the school is motivated by a passion for learning, never "resting on its laurels." New horizons, new gains, new mountains to climb are continuously sought out. Such discovery and learning on the part of all participants is considered the central business of the school.

Indicator A: Continuous Planning for Improvement

Throughout the school, there is continuous planning for improvement. There is an ongoing search for better approaches for addressing challenges. Barriers, failures, and problems are treated as issues to be studied, understood, and resolved. Even when results indicate high levels of achievement, educators expect themselves to constantly achieve higher goals. The school is a true community of learners. As students learn, educators are always engaged in the process of learning, growing, and improving.

Reflective Questions	Response
What examples indicate that educators are constantly engaged in the process of learning, growing, and improving? Is there a process in place to support continuous planning for school improvement?	
How are barriers, failures, and problems related to student learning addressed? Give some significant examples.	
What happens when goals are reached? What happens when goals are not reached?	
Does the Campus Improvement Plan support the continued professional growth of members of the school community?	
How does the Campus Improvement Plan provide for the creation of future goals when current goals are/are not met?	

Indicator B: Using Data for Improvement

Even when results are impressive, teachers use data from their own practice and from outside their school to create even better approaches to improving student achievement.

Reflective Questions	Response
How do teachers regularly use data from their own classrooms to improve instruction? Give significant examples of this.	
How do teachers use data and information from outside the schools, such as from state reports or professional associations, to improve their practice? Are these data and information shared? Are there procedures for doing this regularly?	
How will data be utilized to gauge progress toward campus goals?	

Indicator C: Empowering Teachers for Improvement

Teachers regularly engage in problem solving efforts, often without the involvement of administrators. Teachers are empowered to identify and study problems, and to creatively pursue solutions.

Reflective Questions	Response
Do teachers feel they can move forward on their own to identify problems and to improve their own practice? What is the evidence that they feel this way?	
How are teachers supported as creative problem solvers? How are their solutions and improvements shared among teachers?	

Indicator D: Monitoring Progress for Improvement

Progress toward the mission is constantly monitored by teachers and administrators. Educators routinely gather data and make adjustments.

Reflective Questions	Response
How are barriers, failures, and problems related to goal achievement addressed? Give some significant examples.	
What data are routinely gathered to assess progress? How are these data used for campus improvement planning?	

What are we doing that adds to a passion for learning and growing?

In what other ways might a passion for learning and growing be furthered?

Use this worksheet to organize your information and to develop your Campus Improvement Plan.

What schoolwide reform strategies will you use to achieve your goals for a passion for learning and growing?	How will you determine if the strategies are accomplishing the goals? What benchmarks will you use?	What resources will you use to implement the strategies?	Given an assessment of your progress, what, if any, reformations of strategies and/or goals are necessary at this point to ensure a passion for learning and growing?

When will you revisit and evaluate the goals, strategies and progress towards projected outcomes established here?

Suggested Readings

Comer, P. James (1996). Rallying the Whole Village. New York: Teachers College.

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Maeroff, Gene I (1993). Team Building for School Change. New York: Teachers College Press.

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Sergiovanni, Thomas J. (1994). Building Community in Schools. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Slavin, Robert E. (1996). "Never-Streaming: Preventing Learning Disabilities." Educational Leadership 53, 5: 4-7.

Trueba, Henry T. (1987) Success or failure?: learning and the language minority students. Cambridge.

Wilson, Suzanne M., Peterson, Penelope L., Ball, Deborah L. & Cohen, David (1996). "Learning by All". Phi Delta Kappan 77, 7: 468-476.

Self-Study and Planning Guide
Feedback Form

We appreciate your suggestions as we strive to make the Self-Study and Planning Guide more useful for schools. Please take a few moments to share your thoughts with us on the effectiveness of this Guide.

1. Provide us with some information on the people who worked with the Self-Study and Planning Guide at your campus. Who participated in the improvement planning process, utilizing the Self-Study and Planning Guide?

Persons Involved	Number of Persons	Persons Involved	Number of Persons
a. Teacher	_____	e. Central Office Personnel	_____
b. Principal	_____	f. ESC Consultant	_____
c. Counselor	_____	g. Other (Please specify)	_____
d. Parent	_____	_____	
		_____	

2. Which modules did you complete? Approximately how much time, in hours, was involved in the completion of the improvement planning process, utilizing the Self-Study and Planning Guide?

_____ Modules completed _____Hours involved

3. How helpful was the Self-Study and Planning Guide in providing an effective process for your committee or team to begin self-evaluation and planning for school improvement? (Mark one response.)

❑ Very Helpful ❑ Somewhat Helpful ❑ Unsure
❑ Somewhat Unhelpful ❑ Very Unhelpful

Comments:

4. Please help us to identify some of the **strengths** of the Self-Study and Planning Guide. What did your committee or team find **most helpful** about each of the following:

The Format of the Self-Study and Planning Guide:

The Reflective Questions:
(Please note any questions that you found especially helpful.)

The Data Questions:
(Please note any questions that you found especially helpful.)

Organizing Questions for Developing the Campus Improvement Plan:
(Please note any questions that you found especially helpful.)

Other Comments:

5. Please help us to identify some of the **weaknesses** of the Self-Study and Planning Guide. What did your committee or team find **least helpful** about each of the following:

The Format of the Self-Study and Planning Guide:

The Reflective Questions:
(Please note any questions that you found least helpful.)

The Data Questions:
(Please note any questions that you found least helpful.)

Organizing Questions for Developing the Campus Improvement Plan:
(Please note any questions that you found least helpful.)

Other Comments:

Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts with us! Please mail this Feedback Form to:

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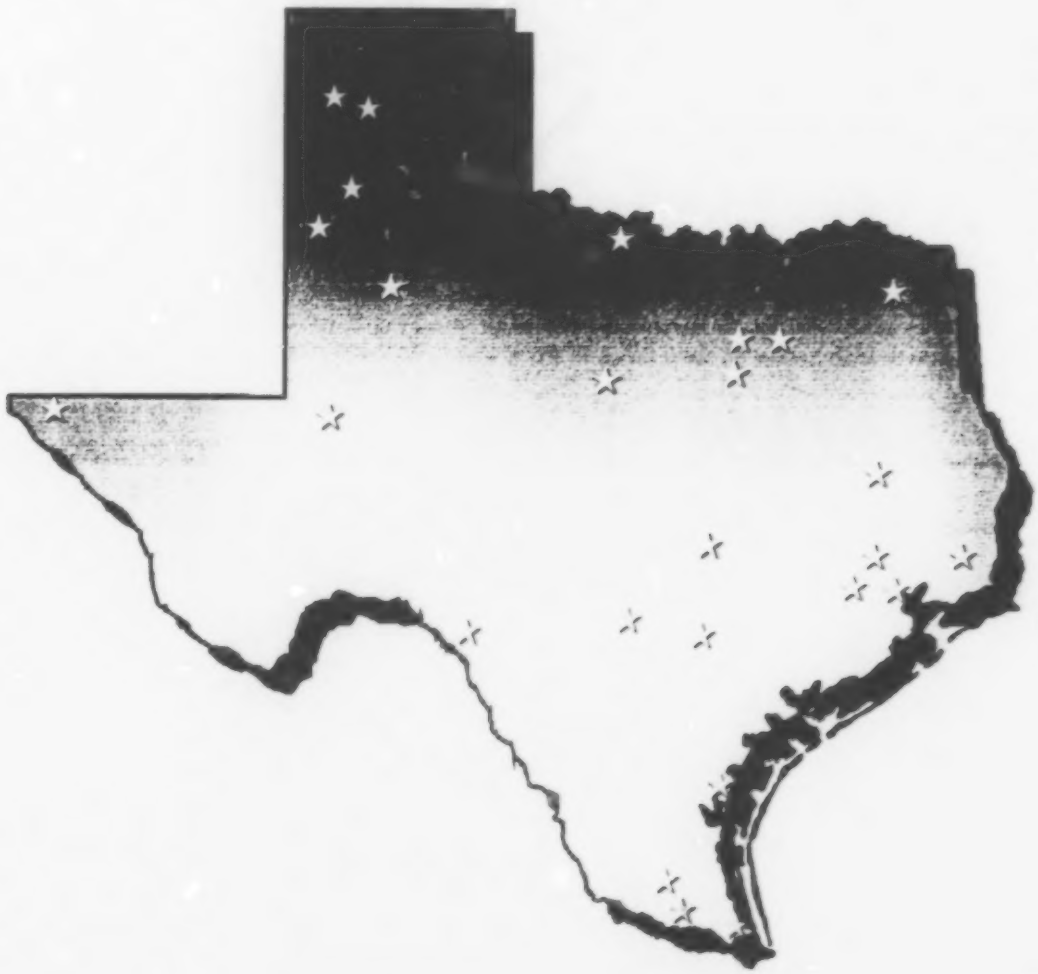
SUCCESSFUL TEXAS SCHOOLW'DE PROGRAMS:

SUGGESTIONS FOR TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROVIDERS



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INTRODUCTION

Technical assistance providers have tremendous opportunities to influence the success of schools in high-poverty communities. Technical assistance provided by education service center personnel, school district leaders, school support team staff, or other entities can focus schools on issues that are critical to their growth and development. This document attempts to highlight issues that could be the focus of valuable technical assistance efforts. Based upon our research of high-achieving, high-poverty schools, we have identified a wide range of issues that might be the appropriate focus of professional development experiences.

We caution technical assistance providers that they are most likely to provide meaningful assistance when they have worked collaboratively with school personnel to identify the areas where assistance is needed. Some schools will need assistance in many areas. Others will need assistance in only a few. If school personnel (including teachers, principals, and support personnel) do not have a substantial involvement in identifying areas of focus, their commitment will be minimal and the impact may be negligible.

Once areas of focus are identified, technical assistance providers are encouraged to remember that professional development is most likely to be effective when it is ongoing (as opposed to one-shot fixes), when it is closely related to the daily experiences and work of practitioners (as opposed to abstract theories), and when it is reinforced through regular practice and feedback. Although workshops might be one strategy among several to assist educators in acquiring new skills, the topics listed in this guide should not be considered workshops. Instead, the topics should challenge technical assistance providers and school personnel to work collaboratively to identify ongoing, intensive techniques that integrate professional learning experiences with daily work experiences.

The following list of topics addresses the issues we found to be important in the success of high-achieving, high-poverty schools. The rationale listed with each topic explain why the topic might be of importance, based upon our research findings.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TOPICS

Understanding the Concept of Schoolwide Programs

- Using the entire school to ensure student success
- Valuing diversity
- Using new approaches to meet the needs of special student populations

RATIONALE: In successful schools, everyone was involved in helping ensure the success of each child. The prevailing attitude was not one in which teachers thought in terms of "he's my student, and that one is yours." Instead, there was a shared responsibility for each student's academic success. To support more inclusive approaches, schoolwide programs were used to move beyond traditional ways of classifying and serving students.

Creating Awareness of Similar Schools with High Academic Achievement

- Raising expectations
- Eliminating myths about the academic performance of students in high-poverty communities
- Developing commitment to improve performance

RATIONALE: Personnel in successful schools set high goals for student performance. They ignored conventional "wisdom" about the limitations of students and families from low-income situations. In several cases, school personnel were motivated by learning about the successes of schools with similar enrollments, resources, and ethnic and socio-economic compositions. By understanding that similar schools had achieved impressive results, educators were able to put aside their myths about the limitations of their students and their schools.

Promoting and Marketing the School Plan

- Soliciting and analyzing feedback
- Creating a sense of community and parental involvement
- Developing strategies for communication

RATIONALE: In successful schools, all members of the school community had a high level of ownership in the school plan. The mission was shared and understood by all staff members, parents, and students. School staff actively solicited input from students, parents, and the community and included their feedback in instructional goal setting and planning. Educators used a variety of techniques to communicate the school mission, goals, and activities.

Establishing Commitment

- Defining commitment
- Clarifying the relevance of commitment to school planning activities
- Modeling methods for maintaining commitment

RATIONALE: In successful schools, staff accepted no excuses for poor performance. As barriers to improvement were encountered, educators worked together to overcome those barriers. No matter how high the level of achievement, schools continued to focus on learning, growing, and improving.

Conducting Comprehensive Assessments

- Implementing a variety of assessment strategies
- Identifying strengths as well as areas of need
- Selecting appropriate techniques

RATIONALE: Personnel in successful schools had in-depth knowledge of strengths and needs related to their academic achievement goals. There were ongoing efforts to understand what worked and what did not work to improve the achievement of their students. This assessment information was used to help them improve instructional strategies or approaches; the organization of the school day; the use of equipment, facilities, or other resources; as well as address other factors that influenced the achievement of students.

Strategic Planning

- Visioning
- Establishing planning processes
- Evaluating and measuring performance

RATIONALE: Personnel in successful schools had a clear vision of where they were going and how they were going to get there. This vision evolved through the collaboration of many teachers, support personnel, and parents. Also, successful schools had systems for monitoring their progress toward their vision. These systems were used to help them refine their efforts in ways that improved academic achievement.

Selecting New Employees

- Determining expectations
- Determining selection and review processes
- Supporting new employees

RATIONALE: In successful schools, personnel set high standards for the selection of new personnel. Each staff vacancy was valued as a critical opportunity for improving the school. Often, there was broad staff and parent

involvement in the selection process. Interview questions were structured in ways to determine if candidates held the same beliefs and were committed to the same mission as the school. Once teachers and other staff were employed, a variety of supports was provided to further develop their commitment to the mission of the school.

Promoting a Culture of Professional Development

- Determining professional development needs
- Creating professional development plans
- Measuring program effectiveness

RATIONALE: Personnel in successful schools maintained high expectations for the performance of all school personnel. Professional development was not an event in these schools; it was a way of life. Teachers, administrators, and other staff were always engaged in activities that allowed them to better understand the effectiveness of their current practices. Such activities provided them varied opportunities to expand their repertoire of skills in ways that resulted in improved teaching and learning. Professional development was inextricably linked to the performance of students and the goals of the school.

Team Building Strategies and Techniques

- Defining the team concept
- Building trust and support
- Mentoring

RATIONALE: In successful schools, school personnel valued each other and each other's ideas. People had the freedom to disagree, discuss their disagreements, and learn from each other. The schools were characterized by a strong sense of respect for all members of the school community. Diversity was not a problem; it was an asset that promoted a shared belief that every staff member made a meaningful contribution to the success of the school. School personnel were given varied opportunities to observe practices modeled by fellow colleagues and mentors. The school calendar was structured in a way to provide regular opportunities for school personnel to work together, plan together, and learn together.

Making High-Quality Decisions

- Using the school mission to drive decision making
- Using performance data to drive decision making
- Involving those affected by decisions in the decision making process

RATIONALE: Successful schools based decisions on what they determined was best for improving the academic achievement of their children. "What's best for kids?" was heard repeatedly as teachers and other personnel discussed

options for improving curriculum, instructional strategies, or the organization of the school. To determine what might best influence achievement, educators used data from a variety of sources. Decisions to adopt programs or practices were influenced by the process of collecting, disaggregating, and analyzing data. Decisions were rarely made unilaterally. The input of all who might be affected by those decisions was carefully considered. Thus, there was broad commitment to the successful implementation of most decisions.

Managing Conflict

- Maintaining a focus on the school's mission
- Dealing with disagreements effectively
- Solving problems effectively and efficiently

RATIONALE: In successful schools, personnel had disagreements and conflicts, just as any other school. However, in these schools conflicts were resolved quickly, without distracting focus from the mission of the school. School personnel were able to openly discuss their concerns without personalizing disagreements. Even in their conflicts, they demonstrated respect for each other.

Managing Change

- Promoting leadership
- Facilitating the change process
- Encouraging adaptability

RATIONALE: In successful schools, all personnel were allowed the space in which to experiment, fail, and try again. Experimentation flourished as individual teachers, grade-level teams, site-based decision making teams, and entire school staffs considered new ways to stimulate the achievement of students. Teachers, counselors, and other school staff were comfortable in assuming leadership roles in facilitating change processes. Students were not expected to adapt to the instructional styles of their teachers; instead, educators adapted to the strengths and needs of students.

Valuing Diverse Populations

- Respecting cultural and linguistic differences
- Respecting the abilities of students with special needs
- Respecting the situations and contributions of parents and families

RATIONALE: In successful schools, personnel found many ways to demonstrate their respect for each student, each student's family, and each group of students. This respect was demonstrated not just for one week a year, but was an integral part of how members of the school community (teachers, students, administrators, parents, volunteers, support staff)

interacted with each other and with students. Labeling was avoided as educators focused more on student strengths. Similarly, school personnel empathized with the difficult situations in which families sometimes lived. They respected the strengths of parents and found ways to maximize the use of those strengths in support of students.

Determining Student Performance Standards

- Using formative assessments
- Establishing challenging student performance goals
- Establishing standards for student performance after the transition to the next grade level or school (vertical planning)

RATIONALE: Personnel in successful schools set high goals for student performance. The high goals were based on student performance related to the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), as well as other measures of student success. Regular assessments were used to provide teachers with formative information that allowed them to improve instruction and monitor their progress toward their instructional goals. Teachers were focused not only on getting students to perform well in the current year or grade, but were also concerned about ensuring high levels of student achievement in succeeding years.

Creating a Supportive Environment

- Fostering and nurturing a sense of family
- Promoting mutual respect
- Nurturing persistence and resiliency

RATIONALE: In successful schools, personnel found many ways to support and nurture each other. Often, this support enabled them to withstand and overcome difficult situations as they sometimes worked against formidable odds. Despite the difficulties, staff enjoyed working in these schools, in part because of the supportive environment. Turnover was low and educators came to work each day with optimism and anticipation of success. The actions and attitudes of administrators and other school personnel were critical in creating an environment in which educators felt that their personal well-being and professional success were supported.

Adapting Instruction

- Focusing on strategies that build upon student strengths
- Focusing on strategies that build upon the strengths of parents, families, and community members
- Focusing on strategies that build upon teacher strengths

RATIONALE: Personnel in successful schools continuously worked to identify the strengths of students; parents, families, and community

members; and school personnel. They then used those strengths to modify their practice. For instance, when students appeared to learn best through a particular strategy, instructional approaches were modified to emphasize that strategy. Strategies chosen are those most likely to result in high levels of student achievement. Similarly, when school personnel identified the strengths of parents, families, or community members, school personnel found ways to use those strengths. School personnel employed programs or strategies that involved the home and the community in the learning of the student. Just as well, when school personnel identified strengths in each other, they used a variety of teaming approaches that allowed them to utilize and build upon each others' strengths.

Enhancing Accountability

- Creating a shared sense of accountability
- Avoiding blame
- Avoiding excuses

RATIONALE: In successful schools, personnel created and maintained a strong sense of accountability for the academic success of each student. Because they firmly believed that every student could be academically successful, they refused to be satisfied with less than excellent progress toward the goal of outstanding achievement for each student. When progress was insufficient, educators expressed concern and worked together to find solutions. However, it is important to note that educators did not cast blame toward themselves, students, parents, or other parties. They attempted to understand the reasons for student performance in ways that involved everyone in constructive solutions. Similarly, educators did not defend low performances with excuses. Excuses were viewed simply as barriers that would be overcome.

Integrating Technology

- Purchasing technology that supports instructional goals
- Determining effective ways to use technology to support learning
- Providing support that promotes continued improvement in the effective uses of technology

RATIONALE: Successful schools often used technology to support their instructional goals. However, computers were not purchased simply to have technology, but were valued as a tool to help students learn. Schools recognized that technology was not a substitute for instructional personnel. Instead, they made sure that instructional personnel had adequate professional development to assist them in their efforts to provide high-quality instruction with the aid of computer technology.

Integrating the Delivery of Services

- Involving the community
- Transcending traditional roles
- Creating efficient and effective safety nets

RATIONALE: Successful schools involved the entire community in ensuring that the needs of students were adequately addressed. Educators assumed the role of advocates when their students presented needs that might interfere with their learning or well-being. They identified agencies with potential to assist their students and helped make the connections that led to the delivery of services. When services were not adequately available in the community, educators were willing to go beyond their traditional roles and do "whatever it takes" to ensure that the needs of students were met.

Identifying and Using Resources and Services

- Finding new sources for funds and services
- Using existing resources and services in new and better ways

RATIONALE: Successful schools were creative in finding needed resources. Schools worked with businesses, local agencies, and adopters to acquire resources and services. Similarly, schools were aggressive in seeking out new sources of funds from their school districts, the state, foundations, and the federal government. A lack of resources was never an excuse to stop trying. Schools were equally persistent in finding new ways to make use of existing resources. Priorities were identified based upon their potential to improve the achievement of students. Lower priorities were sometimes eliminated to make room for higher new priorities.

Promoting Continuous Learning

- Building passion for learning among school staff
- Building passion for learning among parents and families
- Building passion for learning among students

RATIONALE: Successful schools never stopped learning and growing. Educators were always engaged in the search for better strategies, approaches, and programs. Educators were always willing and eager to learn how to improve their practice. Even when achievement results were high, educators searched for ways to improve, ways to reach more students, ways to attain higher levels of achievement. This passion for learning was contagious. It was transmitted to parents and other family members in ways that motivated them to greater involvement in the education of their children. It was transmitted to students who found that learning was exciting and worthwhile.